CAMBODIAN GLORY

The Mystery of the Deserted Khmer Cities and their Vanished Splendour; and a Description of Life in Cambodia to-day

By

H. W. PONDER

F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A.

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CAMBODIAN CLORY

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JAVA PAGEANT

AN IDLER IN THE ISLANDS

GIANT GUARDIANS OF ANGKOR THOM

Among the hundreds of giants that guard the entrances to Angkor Thom, are some that have two, or even three heads—all of them with four faces

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To the Memory of
W. B. H.
To whose wise and witty counsel
I owe so much

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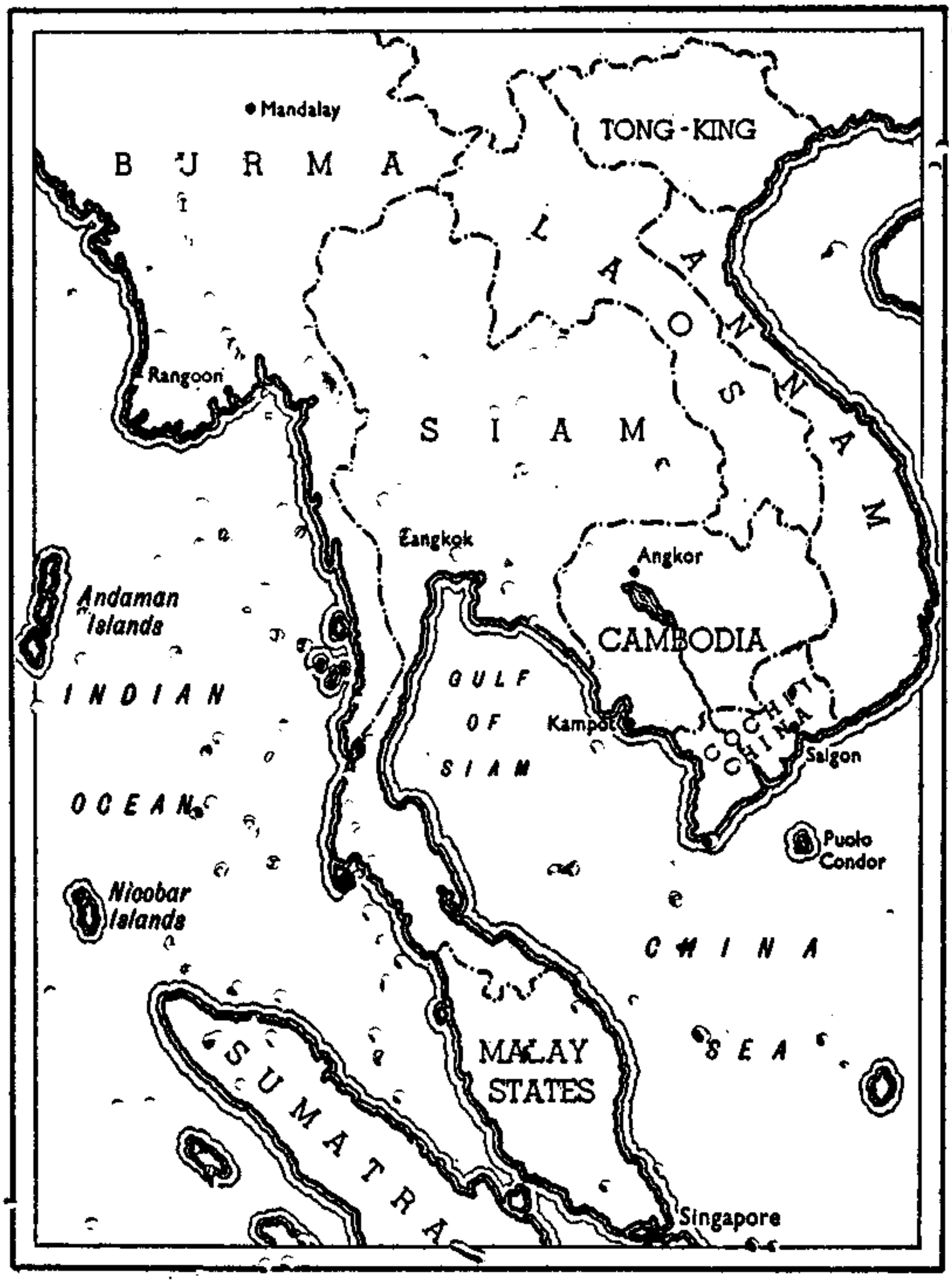
PREFACE

All visitors to Cambodia, even with the late Conservator's admirable *Angkor Guide* in hand, find themselves beset with a thousand and one unanswered questions. For in this ancient kingdom, where 'all doors open onto mystery', curiosity refuses to be satisfied with merely local information, but ranges farther afield among the new riddles that present themselves with every strange sight, every native met, or curious custom observed. And although in the following pages some sly fun is poked here and there at the 'tourist'—everybody knows that among this bustling fraternity there are many whose interest is genuinely eager and intelligent, who for lack of time and opportunity, or some other reason, are unable to satisfy it. It is to them, as well as to those others who do their travelling from an armchair (who, after all, perhaps, have chosen the better part) that this book is offered. It makes no claim to be either archæological treatise or guide, or to solve all the problems of the puzzled modern pilgrim. The best it can hope to do is to illuminate some of the many aspects of this mysterious region which may prick the curiosity of the twentieth century traveller.

H. W. P.



INDO-CHINA

Showing Cambodia's position among the neighbouring states; and the various approaches to the ancient kingdom by land, river, and sea. (A system of canals connects Saigon with the River Mékong.)

CHAPTER ONE

THE PILGRIM'S WAY

'Buried cities, aren't they?' seems to be the usual comment if the name 'Angkor' should chance to crop up in conversation. And it is not such a bad description—though 'drowned' would perhaps be a better. For buried, or submerged, these huge mysterious cities and temples have been for centuries, deep down in the silent green depths of the tropic jungle; locked fast in the octopus grip of writhing roots and teeming growth on the floor of a vast arboreal ocean, hundreds of feet below its leafy surface.

And they are just as deeply submerged in mystery. Since the first explorers hacked their way to them through the forest, in the latter half of last century, many learned men have devoted their whole lives to their study. But all their researches and the mighty tomes that are filled with them, leave Angkor still as unaccountable as though it were that impossible thing—the tangible evidence of a fairy-tale.

Therein lies the secret of Angkor's enchantment. For though fairy-tales are out of date, and Magic in our time has been reduced to mathematical terms, we still love to be mystified. And 'Angkor' is a riddle to which no one yet has found the answer.

A journey to this land of the Khmers, or ancient Cambodians, is no longer an heroic adventure, and the modern pilgrim need fear none of the hazards and distresses that had to be faced by travellers of other days. In the way of transport there is considerable variety. You can start by train from Singapore, and so via Bangkok to Aranya Pradet, the border-town of Siam and Cambodia (than which it would be hard to find a less prepossessing spot on the face of the globe), and thence to Angkor by the bi-weekly motor-'bus; awaiting this at the Rest-house, whose good-natured Russian proprietors will always find you some sort of shakedown, even if it means giving up their own beds.

You can take ship from Singapore to Saigon, and thence by motor-'bus—a two days' journey—right through to Angkor; or else by river-steamer to Phnom Penh, the modern Cambodian capital, and on by 'bus from there. These are the ordinary, modest means of approach. But for those fortunate persons whose pockets are generously lined, the thing may be done in more opulent style: you can ship your own car from Singapore and drive the whole way from Saigon; or you can hire a private car there—at a cost that may seem less staggering if it is borne in mind that Cambodia is a country where life-size images are still fashioned of pure gold, and studded lightheartedly all over with diamonds.

Finally: if you wish, you can fly. For 'Angkor' now figures proudly as an air-port on the map issued by the 'Air France' Paris–Saigon route: and that surely is an apogee of glory never dreamed of even by the proudest of the ancient kings. Though it must be admitted that the 'port' is not really quite as imposing as it sounds. Angkor lies in the centre of a vast plain with horizons as wide as the sea; and though much of it is covered with forests, there are miles of open grassland that provide excellent natural landing-grounds. It is to one of these that a rough track—indicated by a board grandiloquently announcing: 'To the Aerodrome'—leads the inquisitive visitor; and though he will probably see no sign whatever of aviation, the walk will not have been in vain, for the 'aerodrome' in its lighter moments, is also an elephant-paddock. Whether any plutocratic pilgrims have yet visited Angkor by the airway, I cannot say; but the landing-ground has been of good service in some recent surveys of the old Khmer kingdom from the air.

The first time I set out for Angkor, the early stages of the journey were as conventional as you please, but none the less entertaining. Knowing no better (and moreover, it was before the 'depression') I had booked first-class on a comfortable steamer run by one of the Singapore–Saigon French companies; only to find that a second-class passage at little more than half the cost would have purchased almost exactly the same amenities.

There were about half-a-dozen passengers in the first-class, and one solitary man in the second. Two tables were set side by side in the saloon: the Élite at one, with the Captain at its head; and the one second-class passenger, like a poor relation, at the other. Exactly the same food was served to all of us—the only point, religiously observed by the table 'boys', being that the Poor Relation invariably got his portion last. The same good red wine (included in the repast according to the charming French custom that other countries might so worthily emulate) was set before us all. The only apparent advantage that we Élite could claim was the dignity lent to our meal by the presence of the black-bearded Captain, who despite his youth (he confided that he was 30), possessed the manner of a patriarch. Nevertheless, he was quite unequal, beard or no beard, to suppressing the ebullience of two very sprightly ladies from Paris, who described themselves as 'dress-importers'; and on the whole, the Poor Relation's table was distinctly the more decorous.

The ships of this local service are the only means of communication between the outer world and Pulo Condor, an island convict settlement to which native offenders are deported by the French from Indo-China. There are three thousand prisoners—all men—the only Europeans being the French Governor and his wife, the police and warders and their families, and a small military force. It is a wild and lonely, though beautiful place, and it is little wonder that the call of the fortnightly steamer is an event of some importance. On this occasion we arrived after dark, and could see nothing but a vague mountainous outline and twinkling lights, as we lay rolling on the swell nearly a mile off the shore. Warders and their ladies came trooping aboard, chattering excitedly; and I am sorry to say that the comments of the two Parisiennes on the toilettes of the feminine contingent (which may perhaps have been just the least thing démodée) were not as kind as they might have been. But as the visitors were blissfully unconscious of these criticisms, they did not detract from their enjoyment in the least; and they sat round the tables drinking red wine and eating *patisseries* until the ship's bell sounded

their curfew, and they departed down the side in a whirlwind of handshakes and embraces.

After that our passenger-list was much augmented. The little saloon and bar on the after-deck were crowded and overflowing with soldiers and warders going on leave. The years at Condor had been dull and long, but they were over at last; and the glorious occasion was celebrated in choruses that never ceased the livelong night. But it should certainly be recorded that although many gallons of 'vin ordinaire' must have been consumed, there was not a man of them all but marched ashore next morning apparently as sober as a judge.

The first sight of Saigon at dawn, is an immensely long line of lights that seem to link two low hills, on one of which stands the lighthouse of Cap St. Jacques. It takes four hours or more to steam up the wide, mangrove-fringed river, meeting every now and then a sturdy, square-sterned, three-masted sailing craft, with a big watchful red, blue, or yellow eye painted on each side of her prow, tacking downstream with the aid of a long sweep. As you get farther from the sea, mangrove gives place to rice-fields bordered with nepa-palm; there are buffaloes grazing here and there, and an occasional very humble native house, with a woodstack beside it.

Arrival is oddly informal. It is growing warm by the time the ship ties up, and a little group of people is standing in the shade of a big crane at the edge of the wharf. There are two or three motor cars; a dozen or so rickshaws (here called 'pousses', with a humour that ought to be Irish; for they are not pushed, but pulled); perhaps a score of men—never a woman—and that is all.

Passing the Customs here is as pleasantly informal as the arrival. Your pousse-coolie pulls up, after trotting you down the long wharves, and waves an explanatory hand towards a neat little lodge at the gate. You exchange compliments with the official inside; he accepts your word that your luggage contains nothing dutiable; and off you trot again, down a long straight road, over a bridge, and along a shady riverside boulevard, while you wonder what may be in store as a result of your laconic instruction 'Hotel!'.

For that priceless lingua franca of south-eastern Asia, Malay, is useless here, and you are dependent for a means of communication upon the queer pidgeon French learned by the natives in the schools.

My luck that day was in. We stopped outside as pleasant a hostelry as one could wish for; a modest place facing the river, exactly like one in any French provincial town. For the colonial Frenchman lives in a perpetual exile of the spirit, and provides himself with what compensation he can by creating as exact a reproduction as possible of 'la belle France' in his new surroundings. Saigon is so 'French' as to be startling. The tree-shaded embankment could as well be on the Seine; the noble boulevards with their double avenues of trees; the broad pavements with their cafés—might all have been transported ready-made from France. Hotel life, too, is characteristically French, with both its advantages and disadvantages, and just a few concessions to tropic conditions. One of these latter is the ice-boy; an attendant sprite whose sole duty it is to flit here and there about the dining-room popping lumps of ice into the wine-glasses, into which they slide with an extraordinarily refreshing tinkle. Another is the method of serving butter, plastered round a lump of ice, like the crust round the apple in a dumpling.

The river-steamers leave Saigon late in the evening, when the lamps along the embankment are throwing weird shadows under the big trees. I went on board at the appointed time, but for another hour or so ghostly figures moved leisurely up and down, loading all sorts of queer-shaped and queerer-smelling merchandise, while the little ship lay creaking at her ropes. She cast off quietly at last, without fuss or farewell, and we slid away into the darkness through the deep waters that had travelled to meet us from the secret places of Thibet.

I sought my cabin, which was large and clean and promised comfort; undressed quickly, and climbed on to the spotless bunk, half lost already in dreams of the marvels towards which the ship was bearing me. But I was brought back to realities again when the back of my head came down with a crack on a pillow as hard as the wooden neck-

rests used by Japanese ladies to prevent disarrangement of their coiffure. But I, alas, lacked both the 'bun' and the necessary training to sleep under such conditions; and the bare cabin offered no substitute. The few changes of thin clothing in my suitcase would scarcely make a pillow between them; and besides, to roll up your garments and sleep on them through a tropic night is not conducive to their smartness when the time comes to put them on. Eventually I rolled up my raincoat, and slept uneasily with a strong smell of warm damp rubber under my nose; and had I possessed any superfluous chins I should certainly have lost them all before morning in perspiration.

The Mé-kong (Mekhong or Mekong), whose name means 'the Mother of Rivers'—is immense, melancholy, and mysterious. When day breaks the banks are so far distant on either side that there is nothing to tell you that you are not afloat upon some still grey ocean. There is little sign of life. Now and then a small island appears, looking in the distance like a great ship moored in a deserted harbour. The water is so smooth that even the occasional leap of a fish is startling; and the noiseless approach of one of the dugout canoes that the riverside natives handle so skilfully, seems a visitant from another world—as indeed it is. A world of which we know nothing and can never enter; and which doubtless has not changed at all since the days of those puzzling people whose secrets we try in vain to probe. The humble peasants, as pathetically poor as the palm-and-bamboo shelters that are their only home—live now as they must have lived then, as little affected by the civilization that was born, grew to a splendour unparalleled in history, and vanished—as they are by our passing. Now, as then, they cultivate rice; and whenever the river narrows enough, you can see that rice-fields cover the plains that stretch away on either side to the horizon, with here and there a haze of smoke so thick that it looks like a prairie fire, but is only (so a native passenger told me) the refuse of last year's crop being burnt off as manure for the next.

Round the poor houses are small patches of tobacco or maize, and scattered mulberry, mango, or kapok trees.

Near one of these lonely groups of houses—you could scarcely call them villages—three natives came out in their boat to meet us, and, hanging to a rope that was thrown to them, as we slowed up, held an excited but (to me) quite unintelligible parley with our captain. Then, dropping off, they vanished again, lost within a few minutes in the great shimmering expanse of silvery water. But we learned more of their errand when presently we came abreast of a spick and span white gunboat, from which a dapper motor-launch came fussing across to call upon us.

The story told by our visitors would have delighted the late W. S. Gilbert. It seemed that five native soldiers of the Cambodian army had run away, taking with them five rifles, two machine-guns, and 2,500 cartridges—presumably with the intention of taking up banditry as their profession. How the tale of the desertion had become known to the farming population no one could explain, but they had petitioned the government to send a ship in pursuit of the robbers, who were supposed to have reached their district. It was to tell the same tale of woe that they had stopped us in mid-stream, for they were terrified of being held up and robbed and even murdered.

After the rice-harvest the country is infested with bandits or 'pirates', as they call them here; and the farms along the river bank are particularly vulnerable owing to their easy access by water.

The rice-millers come up the Mékong from Saigon and Cholon to buy grain, for which they pay the farmers in cash. These simple people know nothing of banking, and cannot write; a trip to a town to place their money in safe keeping is an adventure they have never dreamed of. So usually they bury the cash earned by many months of hard labour in a hole in the ground. The custom is, of course, common knowledge, and the river pirates choose this time to hold them up and terrify or torture them into disclosing where they have hidden the price of their crop. If they resist they are murdered. So that farming on the banks of the dreamy Mékong is not so peaceful an occupation as the stranger might suppose. There are no river-police or patrols. The Mékong is too long and the under-

taking too huge for any government to attempt; so the farmers just have to take their chance, always hoping that it may not be their turn this time.

The officer who told the tale waved an arm towards the limitless expanse of country beyond the river, with an expressive shrug. The government had sent a gunboat as a 'gesture' but the chances of capturing the five fugitives with their arms and ammunition (of which he had a neatly typed list) seemed few. The runaways would probably rob a farm or two, sell the stolen arms to other and more experienced pirates, and then, weary of military life, settle down peacefully upon farms of their own in some remote district.

A few pleasant towns are ports of call upon this river journey of a day and two nights; the same journey that took the Chinese traveller Tchou Ta-kuan, who came to Angkor by this route in 1296, 'fifteen days with favourable winds.' He mentions some of these places by names so long forgotten that it is impossible to locate them. They are all busy; but busy in the pleasant, unhurried way of the East. They seem to have solved the problem of being industrious without making a fuss about it; and the cargo that our ship brings to each is landed as though it were an amusing entertainment rather than a sordid necessity. There is not one of these towns whose streets are not avenues of tall, shady trees; and at one of them a European club is built out from the bank on piles, lying like a ship at her moorings, with wide verandahs open to all the wandering river breezes.

It is something of a shock, after the empty immensity of the river, to find the steamer tying up, on arrival at Phnom Penh, at a modern pontoon adjoining an imposing concrete river-wall; the gateway of the latest of many capitals founded by the restless Cambodian kings. Under French protection it has become a most delightful town; but I doubt if many pilgrims on their first journey to Angkor waste much time upon its undeniable charms. Even the King's palace, of whose curving roofs there are such intriguing glimpses above the high encircling walls; and the Museum, built in the style of the ancient Khmer

palaces, must wait till later. 'Angkor' itself, with its mysteries yet untapped, calls too insistently. And the traveller's first concern is to assure himself that transport is available. That, at least, was my own desire; and accordingly I inquired the way to the motor-'bus office, which proved to be a spacious concrete building as modern as any in Europe. And there I booked a seat as prosaically as though for a trip from Paris or Marseilles. A plan was produced; the native (French-speaking) clerk recommended the seat immediately behind the driver; crossed it off with a blue pencil; told me that the 'bus would call for me at six the following morning . . . and I went back to my comfortable hotel for lunch, half regretful that it should be possible to reach Angkor of all places, with such unromantically ridiculous ease.

But the trip did not develop on quite the anticipated lines. Punctually at six the next morning after a delicious breakfast of coffee and rolls, I was waiting outside the hotel in the Place de la Poste, thinking idly how absurdly the scene resembled a 'Place de la Poste' of any country town in France. There was the 'Bureau des Postes et Télégraphes' of characteristic French design; there were the trees set along the edges of the pavements; and the hotel I had just quitted, with its excellent *cuisine* and coffee—as French as French could be! . . . And just then, the 'bus, having loaded the mails at the post-office on the other side of the 'Place', pulled up in front of me.

But the picture I had formed of it, with the booked seats occupied by an orderly half-dozen passengers or so, and the rest empty, quite failed to materialize. It was an admirable 'bus in itself; roomy and well upholstered, even as the polite young clerk had assured me. But there the resemblance ended. The general effect was less that of a respectable mail-carrying motor-'bus than of a cross between an army transport and a village beanfeast. It was crowded to the doors, and overflowing from them, with a medley of native soldiers and their equipment, and men, women, and children of every shape and size, all encumbered with the indescribable assortment of impedimenta that only the people of Eastern races know how to

gather together. There was not a solitary European among them, nor was there one in sight; nor anyone who looked in the least likely to understand any language that I could speak. My room-boy (who had carried my suitcase down) looked helpless and rather frightened; and my prospect of ever sitting upon my so carefully selected seat, number seven, behind the driver, looked anything but rosy. It was already occupied four deep by a Cambodian matron with several children and an enormous basket, apparently containing all the little family's worldly goods and chattels.

I tried the driver in French, and he replied, genially enough, but unhelpfully, in the same language: 'Sais pas' was his invariable reply (as I discovered before the day was out) to all the verbal foolishnesses of Europeans. The room-boy sat himself down on my suitcase and gazed into space, indifferent to the whole affair. The driver sat at the wheel and lighted a cigarette; his assistant sat on the roof and lighted another; the passengers chatted amiably among themselves; the section of the Cambodian army that overflowed the back seats settled itself more comfortably, and hung its feet and a rifle or two more over the sides; but nobody offered to make room for me, and nothing whatever happened. Anything more unlike the Royal Mail setting out for the capital of an ancient empire it would be hard to imagine.

The situation was thus at a deadlock, and I was considering the chances of surviving a day's journey on the roof in the blazing sun among the mailbags and luggage when a new actor suddenly appeared on the scene; a small, spare, wiry figure, tanned and grey-haired and most manifestly British from stem to stern. He spoke no French nor Cambodian nor Annamese, nor any other such outlandish tongue; but there shone so bellicose a spark in the bright blue eyes beneath the tufted bristling brows, while their owner rattled out a fusilade of 'God bless my soul's', and the like, as devastating as shots from a machine-gun—that in a moment the scene was changed. The arms and accoutrements, the boots, bayonets and huge splay feet of the Cambodian Army, to say nothing of the civilian

passengers with their babies and baskets, seemed to shrink as though by magic, and packed themselves, utterly cowed, into the smallest possible space, leaving room and to spare for the new arrival in the seat immediately behind the one that was lawfully (though as yet far from actually) mine. However, this messenger of the Gods (whom I had already labelled 'Colonel Chutney'—for retired Indian Army was written all over him) now applied himself to my case; and in the twinkling of an eye the occupants of my seat also had compressed themselves into a minimum compass, leaving me, if not quite so generous a space as that surrendered to the gallant Colonel, at least room to creep in among their impedimenta. Thus do the Gods of Cambodia send succour to mortals *in extremis*!

None of the dispossessed passengers seemed to bear the least malice. They accepted the new situation with the philosophy characteristic of the East; and the family into which I had thrust myself (seeming to them, perhaps, like some gigantic cuckoo) smiled gently at me as they slid back into very much the same order as before—with the difference that they were now sitting on me as well as on the seat. But at least I was on the outside: a fact I had ample cause to be thankful for as the long, hot day wore on. I was too tightly wedged to turn round and make an exact count of the human freight we carried; but I could see that there were six adults and five children in the three or four places in line with mine; and at least as many bulky baskets disposed in the narrow floor-space at our feet.

But what we lacked in comfort was made up in entertainment. There was never in any theatre a 'turn' to equal that of the driver's assistant, or conductor, who gave an acrobatic performance, only interrupted by short spells for sleep or cigarettes, from the time we left Phnom Penh till we reached our destination. The driver, like most of the great fraternity of 'bus-drivers the world over, was a driver *in excelsis*, keeping up a high average of speed without fuss or hurry or foolish risks, and sat expressionless as a Khmer carving, with long slender brown hands (on one of which glittered an ornate ring set with a yellow stone half an inch across) resting lightly and almost motionless

on the wheel. But every now and then one hand would glide out to the horn, and sound three short 'toots'; upon which, from whatever perch he might happen to occupy at the moment, the conductor would instantly respond to the summons, swinging himself lightly over the car door, if he were inside, and along the running-board; whence, after a word with the driver, he would clamber forward, agile as a squirrel, open the bonnet, and minister to the carburettor, or whatever might happen to need attention; then cover the engine again, and climb back—all with the car travelling a steady 'forty-five', or so. Not that it needed a summons from the driver to spur him on to these gymnastics. He seemed never to be in the same place for five minutes together. A foot dangling close by your ear indicated his return from a tour of inspection on the roof, tightening a rope there or a strap here, and in general seeing that all was well; a necessary precaution in view of the huge top-heavy load we carried. And at regular intervals he crept to the front of the fast-travelling car to tighten the radiator-cap—whether because it worked loose, or out of sheer showmanship I never discovered. He was off the 'bus almost before it stopped at every queer, primitive wooden post-office, running up the dusty path with the mail-bag in his arms, racing back to pour water into an ever-thirsty radiator; and rapidly and skilfully negotiating the charges for every passenger or parcel we picked up or deposited often apparently in the middle of nowhere, by the roadside; for, crowded as we were, room was always found for more—provided the fare was forthcoming.

The road out of Phnom Penh runs first through a pleasant riverside suburb, and then follows the course of the river past a succession of brickfields along its bank. A few miles from the town the traveller will suddenly notice that every man and boy met or passed along the road is wearing a round velvet cap, similar to those worn by the Mohammedan community in Malaya. A small mosque completes the picture, and for a moment it is hard to believe that you are still in the heart of a Buddhist country. But the small Malay colony is soon left behind

—the boys are all bare-headed again—and you find yourself back in the land of bonzes [1] and pagodas.

After a long détour over a track deep in dust, to deliver the mail at a straggling village, we doubled back to the 'Bac' or ferry, across the wide river. Here all the passengers alighted, following on foot while the heavy 'bus crept down the slope to a pontoon: and thence on to a raft only a few feet longer than itself, with nothing to prevent it rolling off into the water but some chocks of wood pushed under the wheels. Which was perhaps the reason why the regulation printed in three languages, to the effect that 'No-one may remain in the auto-'bus during transit'—was so scrupulously obeyed!

The motive power was a launch, which pushed us sideways against the current, and whose roof proved a good vantage-point from which to photograph the big car, and the motley crowd with their ponies and chickens, bundles, baskets, and bicycles, taking passage across the river. Among them—as at every stopping-place along the route—was a blind beggar, who sang an odd, pathetic monotonous little song over and over again as he stretched out a skinny hand to each person in turn for alms, guided by a small girl carrying a dainty, brilliantly coloured parakeet perched on a slender bamboo. There were sellers of stunted, dusty bananas and oranges from dry, poverty-stricken gardens, and of pieces of sugar-cane; of rice-cakes, and cooked rice wrapped in banana-leaf. Children offered tiny bunches of a pink flower, like our thrift, which grows wild in the moisture of the water's edge; and a 'musician' sang softly to a one-stringed instrument made of a block of wood and an old treacle-tin; the exact double of those being played, perhaps at that very moment, at the edge of London pavements, to tempt pennies from the pockets of passers-by.

There is a straggling village near the crossing on each side of the river; and looking back to the bank we had left, a long thin line of fragile-looking palm-leaf houses stood out clearly, perched high on their stilts above the water. Beyond them, the flat horizon was broken to the

[1] Buddhist monks.

westward by twin low wooded hills, one of them crowned with a trio of white pagodas; on the other, a solitary silvery spire pushed up through the foliage beside the red roof of a monastery. After this, the landscape from horizon to horizon was almost as flat as the sea. It was but rarely that a low line of hills rose above it; the only striking variation was when once, not long after crossing the river, the road skirted close to the end of one of the rare sandstone outcrops, and passed through the village that the quarry there being worked had brought into being.

All day long the road—raised several feet above the level of the surrounding country, like the ancient causeways it has replaced, to make them passable in the wet season—threads its way like an endless white ribbon across the immense plains, through a mixture of rice-fields, grasslands, and light forest 'light,' that is, compared with the giant growth further north that has engulfed Angkor. Probably this country that we are passing through has been cleared, cultivated, and abandoned in turn, countless times since Man first felled the virgin forests, untold ages ago. Who knows what conquerors may have swept across it, destroying the peaceful cultivators and their rice-fields, long before the building of Angkor? Or how many generations of new settlers may have drifted in to make their homes there, only for the same sad story to be repeated over and over again?

The road was built in 1923, and for much of its length rests on the foundations of the old Khmer highway, crossing twenty-two ancient bridges. Some of these were unsafe, and have had to be demolished; but over many others the modern traveller passes unknowing, till he reaches the Span Praptos, forty miles south of Angkor, where the seven upreared heads of the Serpent-King Naga-Raja, the traditional founder of the Cambodian race, adorns the balustrades. The land is richer as the road runs northward. The grass is dotted with clumps of trees, giving a pleasant, parklike effect to the picture; there are groves of palm and bamboo, and the forest is bigger and older. Everywhere there are reservoirs, dug by the peasants in order to conserve enough water in the rainy season to carry

them safely through the dry one; and at each of these pools the traveller has a glimpse of the bird-life in which Cambodia is so rich. Ibis and heron of various kinds—especially the comically solemn 'advocate-bird'—stand perched on their long, slender legs all round the brink: sometimes rising in a lovely, sun-gilded cloud as the 'bus roars by; but more often, having no doubt learned by experience that the noisy monster is harmless, letting it go past without so much as the flutter of a feather.

You meet little traffic all day along the road. Now and then a bright yellow spot in the distance will resolve itself into a couple of bonzes, draped in saffron robes, holding big white cotton umbrellas over their shaven heads, and followed by small boys carrying their begging-bowls. Near the scattered habitations, or the towns, you may pass a few poor peasants: the men in loose jacket and trousers, and the women in sampots[1] and long, shapeless garments like chemises, reaching almost to their knees. All are in black; and this mournful attire is specially noticeable to a visitor from Java, accustomed to the colourful fashions of the Javanese. The black 'washing' hung out to dry in the backyards of any Cambodian village through which the 'bus may pass, points the contrast still further; remembering how the reds and yellows, blues and golden-browns of the Javanese sarongs on the line, add to the gaiety of the native gardens.

As the sun rose higher, the heat began to have its effect upon the children. At first they had slept, or sat staring wide-eyed, in the impassive way characteristic of the Oriental child. But now, one by one, they began to whimper; and the cause was soon evident: they were feeling sick! The mother next me had all her wits about her: probably she had dealt with just such situations many times before. It may even have been the reason why her family were dressed in the peculiarly hideous style of European fashions (made in Japan!) that find such a ready sale nowadays

[1] The true national dress of Cambodia was the 'langouti', a sort of skirt, like the Javanese sarong, worn by both men and women. The 'sampot', a similar garment, but with one end pulled through between the legs to give the effect of a baggy pair of knickers, is a fashion imported from Siam.

among Eastern natives, and that one of them wore a starched white *piqué* hat.

Anyway the mother snatched it off its little wearer's head, and held it to the lips of each sufferer in turn as the crisis was reached. And then, by means of signs, which I dared not ignore, pressed me unwillingly into the service, by virtue of my outside seat, to empty the limp, loathsome thing over the side! This done, between each series of paroxysms she tucked it neatly into a corner of the basket containing the family belongings at our feet: where, needless to say, it continued to make an all too potent contribution to the sensations of the day. However . . . it might have been worse. There might, for instance, have been no hat! . . . and all went wonderfully well, considering. It was only when two of the luckless youngsters reached a crisis simultaneously that the results were awkward. But it was just one of those situations in which there was nothing whatever to be done.

Gradually (having perhaps jettisoned all their cargo) the children dropped off to sleep again. All but one—a small boy, whose recurrent spasms continued unabated. The mothers all seemed to be taking counsel together over the backs of the seats. And after much excited chatter, one of them rummaged in the nethermost depths of her basket and produced a tiny bottle of bright green liquid, which she placed carefully in the recess that ran along in front of each seat like the book-rack in a church pew. More fumbling followed; and a request for something, unintelligible of course to me, passed round the crowded car. Someone produced a copper cent; but the matron with the bottle shook her head—evidently it was not what was wanted. It was not until a brightly shining copper coin was handed over, fresh from the mint as a new halfpenny, that she appeared satisfied, and started on her preparations for what I shudderingly anticipated might be some gruesome operation on the wretched infant. Under the interested eyes of the whole 'busload, the operator took him from his mother, laid him face downward across her knees, and pulled up the tiny shirt, exposing the smooth little bare brown back. She then rubbed the coin softly and rhythmically up and down the

whole length of the spine, until a glowing red line appeared; next the line of each rib was treated in the same way, producing a pattern something like that of a skeleton leaf. This done, the bottle was uncorked, and a few drops of the contents—a rather pleasant-scented oil—rubbed none too gently into the design on the luckless baby's back. Throughout the whole process, to my astonishment, the poor little victim never moved and scarcely even whimpered. And when it was all over, a place was made for him on the top of one of the overflowing baskets, where he went peacefully off to sleep, and gave no further sign of sickness for the rest of the long journey.

What the magic remedy may have been, I have no idea; for unfortunately the sign-language which was the only means of communication between me and my neighbours proved quite inadequate to its explanation; and the bottle, which was politely handed to me for inspection, bore no label. Nevertheless, I have passed on the cure as I saw it, and can vouch for its efficacy. Perhaps the mother of some trainsick darling may care to try the experiment with a new penny and her bottle of eau-de-Cologne

Before midday we entered a sprawling town, and pulled up in front of an imposing hotel, far in advance—one would have thought, of the needs of the meagre travelling European public upon this road. But the French, unlike the English, take no chances in such an important matter. Far better, they think, that all the resources of an elaborate cuisine should be poured out upon the concoction of a perfect menu that shall waste its savouriness uneaten day after day than that one appreciative gourmet should go hungry away for lack of it. And I, for one, am in full agreement with them. My gallant fellow-passenger and I, thus thrown together in good fortune as in bad, must certainly have convinced the cook that to-day, at least, he had not laboured in vain; for very soon there was little left but a fragrant memory, of the successive good things that were placed before us.

A thrice-blessed place was this Kompong Thom: and not only for the excellent meal that it provided. For here we left behind us our detachment of the Cambodian Army, as well

as the mothers and children that had shared my seat. And for the rest of the journey the post-'bus carried only a reasonable number of passengers. Even the restless driver's assistant settled down for a time when we set off again, and sank into well-earned slumber with his head on the driver's shoulder. By this time the heat was intense, and I watched the driver a little anxiously, knowing from personal experience the difficulty of keeping awake at the wheel in the tropics. But though his eyes appeared half shut, he never failed to slow up and crawl almost at walking-pace past every buffalo we saw grazing at the roadside; he was evidently familiar with their engaging foible of strolling out into the middle of the road without the slightest warning.

So, in a kind of dusty dream, the heavy car raced on along the hot, straight road until, in the middle of the afternoon, we stopped in front of a lonely post office, standing on high piles far back in a bare, uncultivated compound. And this time it was the driver, and not his indefatigable assistant, who disappeared inside with the mailbag. But the minutes passed and he did not come out again. The sun blazed down more fiercely every moment; there was not a breath of air; and the sweat trickled down the faces of the slumbering native passengers, sprawled higgledy-piggledy on the top of one another, with mouths open exposing garishly gold-filled teeth. Not a sound came from the closely shuttered, grim-looking house that labelled itself a post office, but began to suggest things much more sinister. I seemed to be the only person awake in a world that was callously sleeping while, for all we knew, the driver had been foully murdered by bandits.

In desperation, and with difficulty, I woke the driver's faithful factotum, who seemed mildly surprised at the disappearance of his erstwhile support, and stumbled off, still half asleep, in search of him. Again there was silence. Had a second murder been committed inside that forbidding house? But presently he reappeared, alone; and climbed to his place again; in response to my signs he pointed gravely to the house, then to the driver's seat, and lay down and shut his eyes—which left me in the dark as to whether the poor fellow was dead and my worst fears realized, or only sleeping.

However, sleep seemed to be the fashion. The whole car-load still slumbered undisturbed; and the young man appeared unduly calm, even for an Oriental, to have come from a deathbed. So, after discussing the situation with my compatriot (who at this moment awoke behind me with an angry grunt) we decided to give the missing driver ten minutes, and then go to fetch him, dead or alive. The time was nearly up when at last he reappeared, rubbing his eyes, to explain, by signs, that he had been sleeping to prevent him from falling asleep at his post. Most admirable prudence! But I sympathized less with him than I should have done if he had not left us standing out in the full glare of the blazing afternoon sun while a magnificent mango-tree spread a great blot of kindly shade over the road not fifty yards away.

So at last we came to Siem-Réap: a town which even in the dry season is a pleasant oasis, thanks to a primitive but effective irrigation system, probably exactly the same as that which enriched all riverside towns in the days of the Khmer kingdom's glory. From the river bank, which the road follows, you can see a dozen or more creaking old bamboo water-wheels, all slowly turning with the gentle current of the stream, lifting an endless succession of split-bamboo sections, fixed horizontally all round the double wheel, each in turn pouring its contribution of a tiny trickle of sparkling water into a bigger bamboo or hollow log, which acts as a channel to lead the water on to the thirsty land. By this means all sorts of crops are grown, and the place is justly famed for its vegetables. The fortunate residents enjoy not only the tropic varieties, but also those of temperate climes, introduced by the French. I have never seen or eaten finer tomatoes than those grown by a French acquaintance in this town.

The post office, outside which we pulled up—our last stop before the journey's end—is a neat, square white building, standing back in a shady garden amid a wealth of palms, bananas, and flowering shrubs, surrounded by a pergola covered with bougainvillea, and backed by a row of tall kapok trees. Here the last of our passengers, among whom were a Buddhist bonze bound for the local monastery, and

a dignified elderly Chinese, bade us farewell, leaving only two Western barbarians to make the final stage of their pilgrimage. Our Mecca was very near now. For five miles or so we travelled along a winding road through the forest, into whose depths, keyed up with anticipation, and uncertain how the first sight of Angkor might reveal itself, we peered right and left, expecting to see we knew not what.

And then, suddenly, the forest opened out. Far ahead, rising like strange, lovely giant blossoms from among their own foliage, there appeared above the vague green tree-tops of the jungle that stretched away into the distance, a group of colossal grey-gold lotus-buds; mysterious and strangely delicate despite their immense size, shimmering in the golden haze that illumined the thousand exquisite pinnacles combined in each magically perfect whole: the towers that the natives believe were built not by man, but by the Gods —the crowning glory of the sanctuary of Angkor Wat.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INCOMPARABLE WAT

No wonder that every traveller, on first seeing the Great Wat, finds it hard to believe that the amazing apparition is real. It has all the effect of an hallucination; so vast it is, yet with so strange and delicate a transparency, as though its loveliness might melt into thin air at any moment, like a mirage, or a cloud castle seen at sunset. You gaze fascinated: afraid at first to approach nearer, lest the vision fade and the whole thing prove an illusion.

But no disillusionment awaits the pilgrim to Angkor Wat. An enchanted palace in the distance, its enchantments are multiplied a thousandfold at closer quarters, unveiling themselves one after the other at his approach.

A Bungalow has been cunningly placed just far enough away to enable visitors to acclimatize themselves, as it were, to the distant view of the Wat, shimmering in the sunshine across the moat; and after a time the desire to explore becomes irresistible. 'Explore' is literally the word; for the lay-out of this one temple, meticulously symmetrical though it is, *actually covers, with superb audacity, an area of close upon a square mile.*

It is surrounded by a moat, 250 yards wide, forming the outermost of the series of squares (or rather, in this case, of oblongs) enclosed one within the other, which was the Khmers' favourite plan. And it is typical of their fastidious devotion to detail throughout the whole of this gigantic conception, that its outer wall, almost four miles round, should be adorned with carved mouldings along the whole of its length. The temple faces west; and once upon the wide, flagged causeway that crosses the moat on this side, you can walk straight eastward for a mile, without once setting foot to Mother Earth: right through the heart of the temple to the farther side, where another causeway, now forgotten and invaded by jungle growth, crosses the eastern moat, and leads out into the forest again.

The main approach from the west is a succession of dramatic effects. As you cross the moat, you are faced by an immense façade, whose colonnades stretch away for more than a hundred yards to right and left of three huge central porches, to end in still bigger portals, intended for the passage of elephants and chariots.

It is as you pass into the dark entrance-hall of this great façade that the full view of the Inner Temple confronts you for the first time, framed in the farther doorway: with a noble causeway, running straight ahead from the steps at your feet, to converge at a point in the sunny distance below the terrace from which, tier above gracious tier, rises the mighty Wat itself, with its fivefold crown of towers.

This second causeway is balustraded along its whole length, and seven-headed "Nagas" guard each of the many flights of steps that lead down from it to ground-level. Two exactly matched buildings (called, nobody knows why, 'Hattrei' or libraries, by the natives) stand a little way off to right and left; and beyond each is a square, stone-walled basin whose waters reflect the great pile behind them.

The causeway ends in a flight of steps mounting to an immense cruciform terrace; and from the huge dark porch that yawns in front of you, the colonnaded galleries of the lowest tier end in a mere point of light in the distance to right and left. Straight ahead, another steep flight—the centre one of three—is built into a mass of masonry enclosing it in a sort of tunnel, leading up to an open court cut in four by galleries forming a cross: a place unbelievably lovely, with its four deep basins, filled in the rainy season with water that reflects the gracious outlines of roofs and frontons; the covered galleries with their countless pillars; and the shadowy, mysterious corners where little groups of carven dancing-girls seem to be whispering together at the feet of more stairways than I, for one, have ever been able to count, vanishing into the mysteries above.

Any of these stairways will lead you to the galleries of the second tier, and so to the paved courtyard they enclose, which, except at full midday, is as full of shadows as a mountain ravine. A dark cloister hems it in on all sides; and, rising in its centre, dwarfing to nothingness the twin

'libraries' that here, again, complete the harmony of the plan, is the ultimate sanctuary: the immense, contemptuous heart of Angkor Wat, called 'Bakan' by the natives: the final peak of the sculptured range that you have scaled, only to find yourself still at its feet. Menacing, almost repellent, this monstrous mountain of stone towers above you, forcing your head back to gaze upward at its pinnacle; and there rises before you, from whichever side you approach, an immense stairway—one of twelve such flights—steep and high as though cut in the side of a cliff.

The final climb brings you not to a peak, but to a plateau: on which the cruciform court of the lower tier is reproduced, with the difference that instead of crossing in the centre, the galleries end in four small sanctuaries, behind which is a walled-in chamber under the central tower. The frenzy of decoration that has gone before, only reaches its apogee in the adornment of this highest dome, on each of whose sides, one above the other, are four separate mythological scenes, each framed in the body of a serpent with outcurved heads: sixteen huge carven pictures in all, in a place so inaccessible that to see them you must stand in the extreme corners of the court and gaze upward at an angle very conducive to a stiff neck! And not satisfied even with that, the sculptors have adorned the sides of all five towers, to their very pinnacles, with carved monoliths. Assuredly the ancient Khmers, above all others of the world's builders, remembered that 'the Gods see everywhere'.

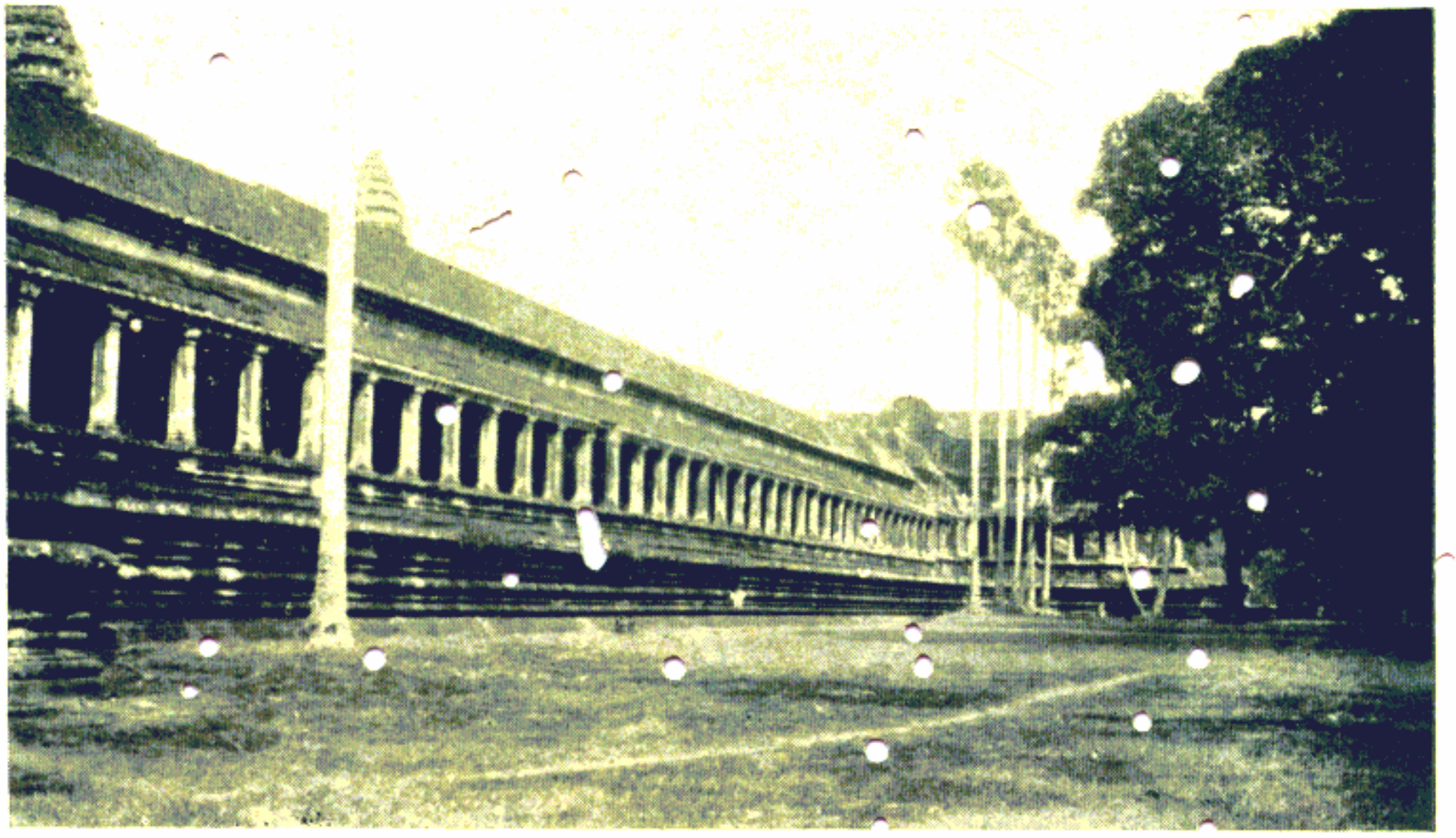
That breathless climb to the Sanctuary is only one of many. Once start to explore the vast labyrinth, and every corner turned reveals vistas as varied as those on a mountain track: now dark and shadowed; now dazzling you with reflected light from the sacred basins; glimpses of galleries peopled with images of gods; angles of stairways and curves of roofs; carved frontons flaunting as coxcombs; the sun shining fiercely in through tall windows between the slender balustrades, drawing their silhouettes in distorted patterns on the worn, uneven flags of the galleries, or here and there picking out with a spotlight the face or figure of some specially favoured dancing-girl in the gloom.

No description can possibly convey an idea of the amazing wealth of carving with which all this enormous mass of masonry is almost literally covered. No one has ever measured the countless miles of mouldings and medallions that have been scattered with as apparently careless a hand as though they were in reality the forest foliage that so many of them represent, even in places where it is difficult to see them. To satisfy my own curiosity, I once made a systematic examination of the mouldings on the foundations of the great façade, the inner causeway, the main temple and its terrace wall, carrying on each day from the point I had reached the day before; and not once (though there are many that time and weather have robbed of their decoration) did I find a stone left uncarved; and not only with designs of leaves and flowers, but with thousands upon thousands of tiny dancing figures.

The outer façade—too often neglected owing to the greater lure of the main temple—is not only a most stately building, but a miracle of carving, and the stone 'false doors' in its entrance-halls are as delicately chiselled as the finest Renaissance woodwork. These halls also contain two Brahmanic survivals, for some reason not expelled by their Buddhist successors: strange, many-armed figures nearly twice the height of a man, called by the natives 'Neak Ta Mata Reach', which might be rendered 'the great Genii-King'. At their feet, as at those of the innumerable Buddhas, there are always tapers and a flower or two: indicating either that the older faith still survives among the common people, or else that in their estimation, one god is as good as another, and it is just as well to keep on the right side of all of them!

The extraordinary low-relief carvings that cover the inner walls of nearly half a mile of the main temple's lowest-tier galleries, are as unfailing an attraction to the visitor of to-day as to the pilgrims of long ago whose pious caresses have given them their polished surface. Many of the scenes are taken from the Indian epics 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata': the best known being that of the 'Churning of the Sea of Milk' by a tug-of-war between Gods and demons, using Vasuki the serpent as a rope; while Vishnu umpires the con-

A view showing half the length of one side of the four-square colonnade enclosing the lowest tier of the main temple at Angkor Wat



The other end of the same side of the colonnade. The inner walls of the entire gallery, measuring nearly half a mile round, are covered with intricate bas-relief carvings

THE GALLERIES OF THE BAS-RELIEFS

test from Mount Mandara, supported on a turtle's back. The Elixir of Immortality and the celestial dancers, or Apsaras, both of which were products of the churning, fall as prizes to the victors—the Gods. A battle-scene illustrating a further struggle for the precious fluid is unfinished; and an inscription, only partly legible, is thought to indicate that the supposed founder of the temple, Suryavarman—here mentioned by his posthumous name Paramavishnuloka—may have died, or ceased to reign for one or other of the causes that brought about the downfall of kings in those eventful times, before the carving could be completed.

All the most familiar Brahman deities figure in these crowded scenes. There is Siva receiving the obeisance of the other divinities; Vishnu riding Garuda into battle against Ravana, king of the Demons; Brahma mounted on his sacred goose Hamsa; and Scanda, god of War, bestriding a peacock. Others ride on elephants, horses or dragons, or in chariots drawn by these and other fantastic creatures. Vishnu also appears in a garden full of ladies gathering flowers, with flights of Apsaras whirling above their heads. And Rama presides over a great concourse of monkeys before his Homeric battle against the Demons, in which he is supported by the Monkey-god Hanuman. This last and greatest of the battle-scenes covers more than a hundred square yards of wall-surface, in which hundreds of warriors, men and monkeys, fight furiously with every sort of weapon, including their teeth. In the centre of the vast tableau the leaders of the three armies are fighting it out among themselves (an excellent example, by the way, for our modern war-makers to follow). Ravana, a tall figure with ten heads, and many arms all brandishing weapons, rides in a chariot drawn by lions; and is fiercely attacked by the gallant God of the Monkeys and by Rama, who is drawing the magic bow given him by Brahma, which will put an end to the wicked Ravana's days. In the opinion of competent critics, nowhere, even in India itself, has this classic of India's greatest poet, Valmiki, been so magnificently interpreted as here, on the walls of Angkor Wat.

The southern gallery is both the joy and the despair of historians, for many short inscriptions are intermingled

with its scenes. They appear on the extended arms of warriors; entwined amid a forest of parasols; floating in the folds of banners; between the prancing legs of horses; and as the ornamentation of swords, shields, fans and palanquins. The name of 'The Lord and Master with Sacred Feet Paramavishnuloka', is several times mentioned; and other lengthy names sprinkled broadcast only add to Angkor's countless unsolved problems.

Not one of all the inscriptions has revealed any record of the great temple's erection, but concerning unimportant matters of centuries later they are ironically prolix. Aymonier, one of the first and most devoted of Angkor students, found and deciphered forty-two comparatively modern scripts, dating from the sixteenth century onwards. Unlike the earlier ones, in which Sanskrit was used, they are all in Pali, the language of the school of Buddhism now in vogue; but they too are dated according to the ancient 'Saka' era (whose 'year one' was our A.D. 78) with the year-names borrowed from the Chinese twelve-year cycle—Buffalo, Tiger, Hare, Dragon, Serpent, Horse, Deer, Monkey, Cock, Dog, Boar and Rat—as used by both Cambodians and Siamese. The lunar months are divided into their first and second halves by the words 'ket' and 'roj', and even the day of the week is added; but no information of value follows this superabundance of detail: only a wordy tangle of self-glorification by the donors of statues, or persons who have piously liberated slaves.

These effusions make it clear that the greater the number of Buddhas presented to the temple, the greater the merit acquired by the donor: which doubtless accounts for the crowds of crude statues that clutter up some of the galleries, in such pitiful contrast with their noble setting. One inscription records the presentation of 'A hundred Buddhas of gold and silver, 34 in stone, and others making 214 in all'; another, whose author had 'a heart full of piety', added 'One Buddha of gold and 36 in wood' to the divine company. Those in stone and wood remain; but it need scarcely be said that you will search in vain for any of gold or silver.

There is an occasional note of originality among all these smug records; as for instance one dated 1587 which relates that a certain queen, having caused her son to restore the Wat 'to its condition in ancient times', was so filled with joy at the result that she cut off her long hair and burnt it as a sacrifice to the temple and its divine architect.

No visitor to the Wat fails to notice the immensely long inscription which almost covers a wall of one of the halls, and which one of the earliest European explorers took for a detailed record of its erection. Unfortunately he was wrong; but though it has little or no historic value, it is surely the most entertaining piece of literature ever engraved on stone. Its translation was published first by a German explorer, Dr. Bastian, and later by Aymonier.[1] It is dated 1702; and the writer, describing himself as a 'Chief Minister', having first announced that his good deeds are too many to remember, proceeds to enumerate them in detail, repeatedly interpolating such comments as: 'I try, but I cannot remember my pious acts! They are countless! How can I?'

The modest fellow then sets out his expectations from the gods in consideration of all this virtue. There is not an unpleasant contingency, in this world or in any of the re-births in which Buddhists believe, from which he does not ask to be exempt. They are a very mixed lot (a fact attributed by his translator to the exigences of rhyme—for the effusion is in verse), and his fancy ranges lightly among such varied items as 'birth into a despised family, poison, infirmities, hunger, lack of culture making me tongue-tied in company, isolation, lack of slaves, insult, murder of one's relations, evil thoughts, sad separations, danger causing the body to tremble, blindness, white hair, loss of teeth, rheumatism, ringworm, baldness, leprosy, rebirth into a deformed body, or one that gives off a nauseating odour, to have ugly or disagreeable wives; and, in fine, all unpleasant things'.[2]

There is an even longer list of positive desires. Our

[1] *Cambodge*, E. Aymonier (Leroux, Paris).
[2] Ibid.

hero requests omniscience and omnipotence; a voice 'so melodious that it makes all who hear it shiver with delight'; 'gold and silver, jewels, silks, precious stuffs, carpets and coverlets, tapestries and cushions, to satiety; processions of women, beautiful, amiable, well-formed and graceful, fair as areca-flowers; knowledge of a means to sleep with open eyes and be transported into dreams of voluptuous pleasure; slaves, men and women, by hundreds and thousands, all handsome and amiable; horses, elephants, cattle and buffaloes, all superbly strong; boats, chariots, saddles, palanquins of gold, richly-decorated and escorted by processions of men with instruments.' And, finally, 'I desire nine beautiful towers covered with gilding, domed, encrusted with glittering stones, surrounded by a triple enclosure covered with carving, the entrances guarded by lions, and the staircases by dragons with raised, menacing heads; the galleries adorned with many porticos and peristyles, and walls enclosing parks of elephants and horses, sundials, pavilions, shelters for travellers, and gardens planted with the sweet-smelling flowers of China.'[1]

In the opinion of both translators, this last description was intended for Angkor Wat itself, which, though all have marvelled at, surely no other than this flamboyant poet has ever aspired to possess!

Who was he? this ineffable egoist of the days of good Queen Anne, who perched here on a bamboo platform (or stood where you stand, dictating to a hand more skilled than his own) to engrave those long neat rows of characters immortalizing his egregious vanity? Was he Cambodian, Siamese, Annamese or Cham? There is no knowing. But a nasty fellow, evidently: a profiteer in slaves; a self-righteous hypocrite; a glutton; an unutterable bore; and a poet, probably, only by proxy! Still, like Queen Anne, he is dead; so we must leave him in peace to enjoy the select rebirths that he so carefully ordered. . . .

Countless pictures with the Great Wat for their setting engrave themselves as indelibly upon the memory as the scenes and inscriptions are carved upon its stones. It may be an aged man seated upon its steps, revealing the future

[1] *Cambodge*, E. Aymonier (Leroux, Paris).

to a group of boys (among whom is a young bonze, who evidently does not consider fortune-telling beneath his dignity) watching with absorbed interest as the soothsayer points with a tiny piece of bamboo to a book lying on the flags in front of him, beside an old pickle-bottle in which is stuck a lighted taper; and now and then, in a voice that is almost inaudible, invokes the particular god of his choice, who (thanks to the propitiatory taper) will be certain to reveal the truth!

It may be the outer façade in the dim light of the half-moon, with its three crumbling towers just visible against the sky, and in front of it, over the black immensity of the moat, fireflies flashing their tiny lamps so brightly that it is almost impossible to believe that they are not boatmen with lanterns.

Or it may be a group of grazing elephants, dwarfed by the immense building beyond them to the negligible proportions of piglings. I remember a trio of them that was feeding one day on the rough grass between the façade and the moat: evidently trespassing, for presently a small, very dirty boy appeared, and proceeded to drive them off the sacred terrain with a flimsy bit of stick. The huge brutes made no attempt to dispute his authority, and one of them, which answered with perfect docility to the inadequate name of 'So-So', made with all speed for a breach in the corniced wall lining the moat, sat firmly down upon her ample behind, and slid in a cloud of dust into the marshy moat below, looking absurdly like a gigantic caricature of a schoolboy sliding downstairs on a tea-tray. Finally, after a happy half-hour of wallowing among the water-weeds (which they pulled up with their trunks and held aloft, exactly as their ancestors have been immortalized in stone) they crossed the moat, half swimming, half wading, encouraged by shouts from their diminutive driver on the causeway, and scrambled out again on to less hallowed ground.

The Wat itself is a kaleidoscope of ever-changing effects from a thousand varied aspects, and it abounds especially in points of view that might have been designed for the purpose of watching dawn or sunset. It is well worth

while to feel your way through the chilly, pre-dawn darkness of the temple to the steps of the highest sanctuary to see the earliest illumination of the piled-up roofs and galleries below; and from a porch overlooking the grass-grown courtyard inside the first great tier, the sunrise has a peculiar and charming intimacy, as though the day were dawning for this hidden, cloistered place alone. It is grey and cool; and, hemmed in as you are on all sides by ranges of roofs, you see nothing of the sun itself; only, as the light strengthens, the canopy of sky overhead is flecked with small fleecy, silvery clouds, that grow brighter and brighter and turn to gold, before they melt into the morning haze. Puffs of breeze blow up now and then, rattling the dry palm-fronds so loudly that you could fancy someone was climbing among them: till the wind drops, and all is silence again but for the faint twittering of the bats in the dark gallery at your back, where night still lingers. Outside the birds are waking in the palms, with occasional violent flutterings; and farther away, oddly startling in these surroundings, a homely, familiar sound of cawing recalls old memories of English rookeries.

No one who has ever watched, from the inner causeway, the dim grey mass of the huge temple gradually taking shape and emerging from the darkness will be likely to forget the sight. Long after all the other stars are extinguished, the 'Morning Star' shines on ever more faintly till it too dies in the strengthening light; and vague figures move like ghosts across the colourless scene, taking this way to the village so as to place a flower or a taper at the feet of one of the temple gods: in utter silence save for the bamboo water-containers slung from someone's carrying-pole, which clack softly together as they swing to and fro.

The sun seems long in coming. But at last he slowly stretches out one long pale ray in a first morning caress, to awaken the lovely sleeping towers as he has done so many thousands of times since first they were unveiled to his delighted gaze. Yet every morning that ray seems to rest upon them with the same lingering worshipful touch:

Dawn at the Wat is exquisite, but sunset is spectacular. As the centre of its gorgeous transformation-scene the enormous pile seems overwhelmingly close, though more fantastically unreal than ever. The wall-carvings in the outer western gallery are orange-red panels framed in purple shadow, barred by the endless uniform row of square pillars, white-hot in the sun; and the detail of the carving, shining like polished copper and brass where the hands of generations of pilgrims have caressed it, is so defined by the searching rays that you can pick out, from a hundred yards or more away, the details of horses and chariots and fighting men in the epic battles of long ago. The curved overhanging roof of the gallery is a warm, rosy, purplish brown, in which the pattern of the carved stone 'tiles' is clearly visible. But the central mass above seems in this strange illumination to be soaring to impossible heights, in which it has lost all solidity, and taken on the unsubstantial fabric of a mirage. The sun-glow has soaked so deeply into its doorways that only a thread of darkness here and there breaks the ethereal grey-gold lace-work of roofs and towers and delicately colonnaded windows, that melt almost as imperceptibly as clouds into the luminous haze of the sky.

Slowly, while you watch, the coppery glow dies out of the carvings in the gallery, and the battle-scenes vanish as completely as though they had sunk into the stone. The wall, now blank and colourless, seems to recede farther and farther until it is swallowed up in darkness, barred by grim grey pillars. The rosy roof turns first a cold brown and then black, as the sun's rays leave it; but the golden light rests longer on the upper galleries, pushing its way as the sun sinks lower, ever more deeply into porches and doorways, until every vestige of shadow within them is chased out of sight. And thus, for an all-too-brief breathing-space, the scene remains unchanged, while behind you the gorgeous crimson globe sinks fierily beyond the outer façade, reflected in the still water of the sacred tank; leaving its heat stored up in the stone on which you sit, sending a glow to your very heart.

By degrees, the level rays, whose light has deepened to

orange, creep higher and higher up the towers, slowly abandoning each tier in turn as though reluctant to say 'good night'. They linger for a moment or two longer on the topmost of them; the tip of the highest central point above the sanctuary blazes like the lamp in a lighthouse for one last second . . . and suddenly goes out. . . . And then the moon, three-quarter full, takes charge of the scene, changing it in the twinkling of an eye from gold to silver; while the Wat, just now so crushingly near, has become a remote, mysterious mass from which all form and colour has departed, curiously suggestive of a rather indistinct photograph of itself.

When the moon is full, the Wat has no sooner wrapped itself in its coverlet of darkness, than it is reawakened to eerie life. Just as the towers have almost vanished in the gloom, a pale unearthly light behind them outlines their shape again, and presently a huge shining disc rises slowly aloft through a veil of small fleecy clouds, contemptuously quenching a faint star that was timidly showing a tiny prick of light in the darkening sky. And the weird, metallic yellowish moon-rays throw your own long shadow in front of you on the uneven flags of the causeway, as you turn your back reluctantly on the temple at last, remembering that the dark hall of the outer façade has to be traversed before you are clear of the great company of ghosts that claim the place for their own after-sundown.

There is one of these that it needs no disordered imagination to show you, if you glance towards one of the porches where part of the roof has fallen in. A tall human figure stands there, with the moonlight striking through the broken roof full on the crown of his head, which he nods gently, as though chatting with someone hidden in the shadows. Next morning you will find the old Brahman god in his place as motionless and impassive as ever: and common sense will tell you that the only things that could possibly have been moving in his sanctuary overnight, were the bats . . . but, strange to say, such arguments are much less convincing if you go to visit him alone at midnight!

Not that there is any need to wait until nightfall to feel ghosts about you in Angkor Wat. It is full of them at all

times: ghosts of priests and princes in gorgeous robes, of pilgrims and temple-servitors and dancing-girls; and most of all, of the humble thousands who toiled to build and adorn it. Everywhere in the hot sunshine you seem to see them; slaving and sweating, with bleeding hands and straining sinews, under the whips of the overseers, to the sound of the band-music that drowned their cries; dragging and pushing and rolling, and by some magic means we shall never know, raising the huge blocks of stone into their places, and rubbing their surfaces together till the joins were invisible. All along the courts and galleries, where the celestial dancers smile down from the walls, and bygone battles are fought again in the carven panorama, it needs little effort of imagination to hear the tapping of ghostly chisels, or the faint clink as one is laid down to exchange for another. And as you walk softly along the endless galleries of the bas-reliefs in the shade made luminous by the glare outside, instinctively you keep well clear of the inner walls, for fear of disturbing the sculptors who, you fancy, look up as you pass from where they squat or stand, or down from their flimsy bamboo scaffolding, with the same dumb, sad glance that their descendants give you when you meet them on the roads or forest paths of Cambodia to-day.

For the most part those highest courts of the Great Wat have about them all the peace of a mountain-top, and are disturbed as rarely. You can be as solitary there as he who 'went up alone into a mountain to pray'; and strangely enough, it is not at dawn or sunset that this lofty eyrie is loneliest, but at midday, when all the world seems to be sleeping in the shimmering sunshine. The whole huge temple is submerged in a hot, breathless silence, into which the tiny twitter of a bat falls now and then like a drop of water into a pool; or perhaps a 'tokek' lizard will startle the stillness with his queer hoarse call, repeating it more and more faintly until it dies away unfinished, as though he too had drifted off into dreams.

This drowsy heat is not altogether lifeless; for butterflies—the souls, so the natives say, of departed priests or pilgrims—often haunt the temple at noonday. They will sometimes flit before you down the whole length of a

gallery, poising now and then with faintly quivering wings on the warm smooth stone of the sculptured wall a few yards ahead, as though to entice you on; until they float out and away into the open over the deep court below, leaving you stranded and helpless at the brink of the precipitous stairway. There is no end to the ever-changing beauty of this great temple's moods. Every angle and doorway; every gallery and tower and courtyard, change their character insensibly at every hour of the day, and even of the night. So that, in so immense and complex an ensemble, some new delight is always awaiting you, however familiar a visitor you may have become. Nor can you (at least I cannot) ever determine which of all its thousand and one phases is the most entrancing.

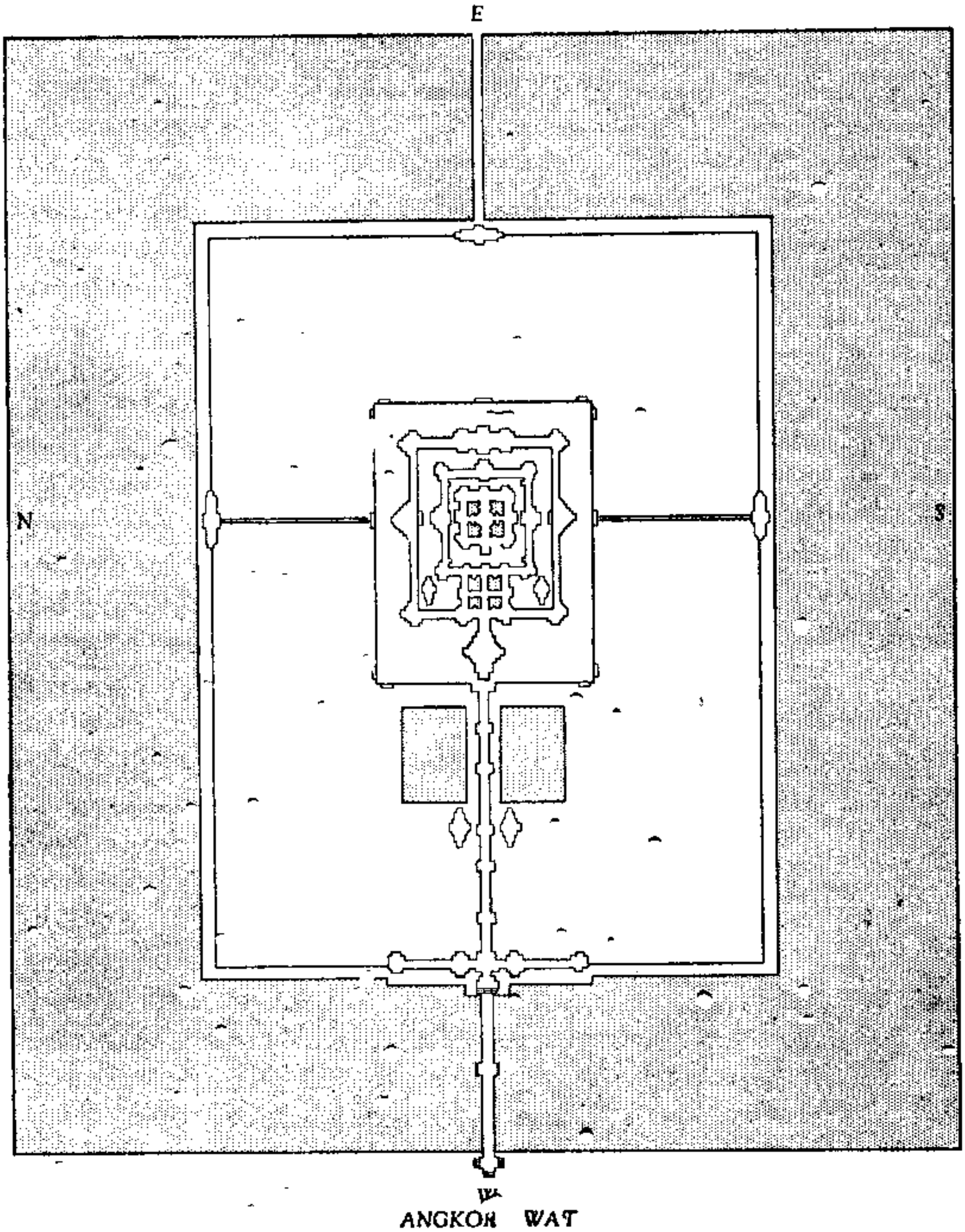
But one thing is certain. At whatever hour of the day or night you choose to visit it, to get the true 'feel' of the place you should have no company but your own. The sound of alien voices chattering foolishly in its sacred courts sends the soul of it into hiding behind the old grey stones. But go to it alone, and you will find it in very truth a temple of the spirit: permeated with that essence of the divine that is the fount of all true faith, whatever the name by which men call their gods. It would matter little whether Angkor Wat had been dedicated to Siva or Vishnu, Brahma or Buddha, Mahomet or Christ; the sublime inspiration that built it came from the fount of all beauty: from the same unknown source of creation that shaped the mountains and valleys, forests and rivers, and all the lovely things of earth and sea. The sense of it is all about you in these quiet courts and galleries: quickening the instinct to worship whatever gods may be, in thankfulness that in our harsh, mechanical, reinforced-concrete modern world, this noble creation of a more inspired age should still survive.

CHAPTER THREE

A CITY OF GHOSTS

When I first arrived at Angkor, my ideas concerning it were of the vaguest. I had read or heard somewhere that the city had been built around a 'central mountain'; that its proper name was 'Yacodharapura', or the City of Yacovarman—a great king who reigned over the Khmers (whoever they might be!) somewhere about the tenth century; that it had been visited and described in its heyday by a sort of Chinese Marco Polo named Tchou Ta-Kuan; and had thereafter disappeared from history until it was 'discovered' by one Mouhot in 1860. And that, more or less, I fancy, is all that the average visitor has to prepare him when he is confronted for the first time with the bewildering apparition of the Great Wat, and the huge, deserted walled city.

But the mystical appeal of the Great Wat is very different from the effect upon the imagination of Angkor Thom—the rather terrifying ghost of a once crowded, busy city. You may try in vain to conjure up the past as you stand looking at the immense walls, inside which nothing is visible but a dense and silent forest; and the knowledge that those walls bound a square of which each side measures about 2 ¼ miles helps very little. But it will come startlingly to life if you draw a square representing those walls on the map of London, with Westminster Abbey as its centre, and Baker Street, Broad Street, Chelsea Hospital and Walworth as its four corners. It would take in the whole length of Oxford Street; all along Holborn and Cheapside past St. Paul's to the Bank; Piccadilly, Hyde Park Corner, the Green Park, St. James's Park, and Buckingham Palace; the Strand, Ludgate Hill, Victoria, Charing Cross and Waterloo; several miles of the Thames and nine of its bridges; the Oval, Lambeth Road, Vauxhall Bridge Road, and a hundred other crowded thoroughfares. That, roughly, is the area of Angkor Thom, the last stronghold



The vast ground plan of Angkor Wat, which covers an area equal to nearly a square mile. The outer shaded portion is the moat; and the shaded areas inside the temple walls are the Sacred Tanks.

of the great Khmer kings. And if you imagine this hive of human activity shut in by tremendous walls, surrounded with a deep, wide moat, crossed by five causeways; and with the Bayon for its centre instead of the Abbey: then you may arrive at some idea of the contrast between Angkor as it was and as it is, and of the magnitude of the tragedy that must some time have overtaken it.

A further aid to picturing the former Khmer capital, is to remember that when the City of London was swept by the Great Fire of 1666, its area was barely one square mile; and if that fire had raged over the same area in the heart of Angkor Thom, you could have stood on the city wall to watch the blaze in perfect comfort and safety. That one square mile of London Town contained nearly a-hundred churches and their crowded parishes; if Angkor was as well provided with temples in proportion to its area, it would have had more than five hundred; and in a great Oriental city every 'parish' would certainly have been even more densely populated than those of medieval London.

It is a pity that modern visitors to Angkor seldom or never enter the city by the 'Thvea-chey' or Gate of Victory, on the eastern side, which leads direct to the Royal Terrace. For by not doing so they miss what is certainly one of the most dramatic architectural approaches in the world. The cars in which helpless travellers are whirled round the ruins (with that singular lack of imagination characteristic of tourist organizations) invariably enter by the south gate, and depart by the Gate of Victory, so that the whole effect is lost. Approached as it should be, from the east, the road through the forest skirts the noble temple of Ta Keo, and crosses the river side by side with the remains of an ancient sandstone bridge, called by the natives Span Thma. A little farther on, it passes between two small but very stately temples, Thom-Manon and Chau-Say, richly carved, and presenting on a reduced scale many characteristics of the architecture to which they were doubtless designed to serve as prelude.

A little farther still, there appears to the startled gaze of the visitor the strangest effect in stone ever conceived by the brain of man. Straight ahead is a tremendous

doorway, its opening 25 feet high, far above which a colossal human face smiles dreamily into space; the head is crowned with a tower in the form of a diadem built up in tiers; and on each side, a similar giant face, seen in profile, gazes along the crest of the wall that stretches away out of sight on either hand. A wide causeway crosses the moat; and the approaching visitor, whose attention has been held hitherto by the enormous giant faces high up among the foliage, suddenly finds himself passing between two files of other giants, pygmies compared with the Colossus of the gateway, but terrifyingly huge at close quarters nevertheless. Each file supports a Naga, 150 feet long, whose seven heads, in a magnificent fan, are held aloft by many-armed super-giants, with several four-faced heads.

Once through the huge, cavernous doorway, the Royal Terrace is just visible, glittering like a jewel in the hot sunshine over a mile away; and as you hurry on, down the long, straight avenue, once doubtless lined with the tall palms beloved of all Eastern designers, the amazing plan gradually unfolds itself. Facing you, in the centre, is the Royal Staircase, guarded by lions and Nagas; on either side, with their backs to the wall, are long rows of Rakshas and Garudas, with arms raised above their heads to bear the weight of the King's Palace that once stood there. Farther out, to right and left, the line of the terrace-wall is broken again by staircases, where groups of elephants with pendant trunks stand sentinel. And beyond them, as far as the eye can see, on either hand, runs the great Wall of the Elephants: a procession of a hundred or more, life-size, with yet another two imposing stairways: ending to the north with the terrace where sits the Leper King, and to the south with the terrace and stairways of Ba Phoun.

The effect as the road emerges, passing between two great square sunken basins full of water, flanked by towers, on to an immense open green space bounded everywhere by stately masses of architecture against a background of lofty trees, is utterly baffling: so fantastically enormous does everything appear. One might imagine that 'Alice in Wonderland' experienced some such sensation when she

bit the magic mushroom and shrank to proportions so tiny that the world about her had become a world of giants. For everything here is on a scale out of all proportion to ordinary, everyday human dimensions; it is as though Nature had deliberately planted a forest of giant trees, to strangle and destroy these arrogantly gigantic works of Man.

The point at which the road debouches upon the 'Place' is midway in a row of ten massive stone towers, which bound it on the east; and from here two great grey buildings like cathedrals are just visible behind them, standing back among the trees. Immediately ahead is the Royal Staircase, a pair of lions at the head of each flight, and a flaunting Naga at the angle of each landing, guarding the doorway of the King's Palace. Far beyond and behind it, there rises like a mountain-top above the trees the 'aerial palace' of Phimeanakas; and if you follow with your eyes the line of the terrace to the south, you will catch a glimpse still higher among the tree-tops of the crest of Ba Phoun. Farthest of all, bounding the 'Place' at its southern end, you can just see, piled up like a jumble of rocky precipices (though it is only a glimpse, so huge is the area of this central space) the groups of gigantic human heads that are the towers of the Bayon.

I doubt if anyone can take in more than a hazy idea of the whole panorama at first. It is too bewildering; the atmosphere is too disturbing and uncanny—much as it might be if you could drive through an empty England and find yourself in the heart of a London abandoned for hundreds of years. It would certainly be some time before you could adjust yourself to the idea of the vast city, deserted and silent, or shake off your bewilderment sufficiently to think of it as anything but a haunted, frightening maze of ruin. But after a while you would dare to attempt exploring its biggest ruins one by one; would climb among the fallen pillars of St. Paul's; peep through the oaks and beeches holding up the galleries of Westminster, and tear away the tangle of grasses covering the tombs of forgotten kings. And so it is at Angkor. The first vague, undefined fear of the fantastic hugeness and

awe-inspiring emptiness of it all, gives way to interest and curiosity. Your wonderment does not grow less; but as you come to know this world of giants better, you begin to see it, as it were, in better focus. Day after day (as you set out to make sure that after all you have not been dreaming) you find the huge grey ghosts still in their places, impassive as mountains and even more alluring. And one by one you set out to scale their peaks, seeking, like the mountaineer, some intangible prize that neither he nor you could ever put into words.

It is the heart of the city, naturally, that calls first and most insistently. For though there are other splendid ruins in plenty, it is round this 'Place Royale' that life must have congregated. So (just as you would probably have done if your visit had been timed many centuries earlier) you set out for the 'Place' to make closer acquaintance with the splendour that once was Angkor.

Hot and silent and empty, the great green space spreads itself before you; and as you wander about it on foot, feeling more of a pigmy every moment in the midst of its vastness, it is easier to picture the crowds that would have jostled you in other days, or the fierce sports and combats that took place on the very ground where you are walking. One such display, indeed, is going on before your very eyes; there, marching along beside the terrace wall, as far as you can see, go the elephants, flourishing their trunks, trumpeting with fierce joy as they trample man and beast —tiger, buffalo, or rhinoceros—underfoot; tear them in pieces and hurl them aloft, impaled on their long, cruel tusks. Or turn to fight each other, while their riders encourage them with hoarse cries, wildly brandishing their spears. How the crowds must have swayed and shouted, and rushed to place bets upon their fancy! . . . here in this eerie, empty, sunny silence, where the only sign of life (and that but rarely) is a few peasants in ragged black, carrying the pathetically small bundles that are an index to their poverty.

When the first European explorers hacked their way into the heart of the deserted city, they found this open space covered with undergrowth, but almost treeless,

though all around its edges there stood a closely packed army of jungle giants, among whose crowded trunks and branches the buildings could scarcely be distinguished. It is thought that the growth of trees may have been impeded by a pavement of some hard-packed substance—possibly crushed stone or tiles made into a sort of concrete—designed to ensure a solid surface in the wet season for the monthly feasts and displays. But the natives have quite a different explanation to offer for this treeless island hemmed in by the forest. The strength of the trees (which they sometimes call 'the Green Gods') was irresistible; but even they must bow to the will of the ancient kings, and dared not encroach on the space which they had decreed should be kept open in front of their Royal Palace.

The Royal Staircase and terrace bring you to the entrance of the Palace enclosure, deep set in the high surrounding wall. Once it was jealously guarded; but now the Palace itself and all its fabulous wealth of treasures have vanished, and you may pass through unchallenged, to find yourself in a place quite as mysterious, and certainly more beautiful: a fairy palace of deep green shadows, walled and roofed by the impenetrable forest. Angkor is full of such surprises: of great ghostly buildings that appear before you as though by enchantment, and melt out of sight again among the trees as unexpectedly as they had showed themselves, leaving you alone in the immensity of the jungle, as though the whole thing had been a hallucination.

Several narrow tracks meander away through what was once the forbidden ground of the king's residence. One of them leads to the front of the square, steep, three-tiered pile of Phimeanakas—still within the vast Palace precincts—and to the foot of the lion-guarded stairways leading up to the sanctuaries, where a debris of tiles suggests that there were once still higher storeys built of timber. Other paths bring you to vestiges of courts and terraces and a great sunken tank: all within the walls of the royal enclosure: life within which one may not unreasonably surmise to have resembled that of the palace at Mandalay, as described by Tennyson Jesse in 'The Lacquer Lady'—

for the Burmese and the Khmers seem to have had much in common.

You can find your way out through one of the doorways in the ruined north wall to a small temple on a terrace called Prah Palilay, a miniature edition of its huge neighbours; and then, if you follow the faint track at right angles, to the east, another surprise is in store; for it is no temple or palace that now looms through the trees, but a huge Buddha, towering far above you, seated in solitary meditation in the heart of the forest, with a gentle, kindly smile upon his face: as well he may have—for he is the immortal testimony to a spirit of tolerance that must have rejoiced him. Here, in the heart of a Brahman city, when Sivaism was at the height of its power, King Yacovarman, himself perhaps the greatest of all the 'king-gods' who adopted the Sivistic symbol as the emblem of their royalty, actually founded and richly endowed a Buddhist monastery, as an inscription on stone duly records. We pride ourselves nowadays on our religious freedom; but it is hard to imagine a Christian monarch founding and endowing, say, a Mohammedan mosque! Nor can we claim that Yacovarman's tolerance was due to religious indifference, for never in the history of religion has it been more dominant, and never has it inspired the erection of such majestic places of worship, as in the days of those who built Angkor. This great Buddha is unaffected by time or weather, as befits a god; but his monastery, Tep Pranam, has almost entirely disappeared.

There is no saying which of all the great buildings in the Ghost City will lure the traveller to explore it next. It may be that the Ba Phoun, shining like a distant peak in the early morning sunshine beyond the ruined façade which prolongs the Royal Terrace to the south, will tempt you to adventure along its precarious causeway and climb to its lofty summit. The terrace and its three stairways are sadly ruined like the façade, but beyond it, the strange long causeway, raised upon tall round columns (in which it is unique among all other such Khmer approaches with their massive foundations) runs straight as a lance to the temple in its setting of lofty trees. Halfway across there

is a small auxiliary temple; and then the gangway runs on again for another hundred yards or so to the remains of the great outer wall—most of whose stones were removed by the vandal Siamese to build a citadel at Siem Réap!

The temple is built up in pyramidal form like the Phimeanakas, but it is nearly four times the size. Each of its three foundation tiers is surrounded by an enclosed gallery or cloister, through which, at the head of each stairway, doorways open on to the courtyards that fill the space between the gallery and the base of the next flight of steps. These flights are painfully steep, for every stair is almost knee-high; the first brings you to the still glorious remnants of the lowest gallery, through which you pass to find yourself in a courtyard where rows of short stout columns stand like stone soldiers at attention: evidently the foundations of one of those auxiliary erections with which the Khmers so delighted to emphasize the colossal scale of their architectural plans. You get here a glimpse of their practical knowledge, too; for an elaborate system of curved gutters, ten inches deep, leading to openings in the outer wall, was evidently designed to assure that this enclosed plateau should not be flooded in the season of torrential rains.

The enormous moulded base of the next storey frowns down upon you like a cliff; and up its precipitous sides go those awful knee-high stairs—deceptively easy to climb with the aid of your hands, but (as you are to find later) as nasty a piece of mountaineering as you could wish when it comes to descending. At the top, another fine entrance passes through the surrounding gallery to a court so narrow that the base of the next 'precipice' almost touches you, and the wealth of bas-reliefs with which the inner side of the gallery is covered, are almost too close to be seen. It is a pity, for there are some delightfully intimate little pictures among them; there are country carts with the drivers sitting on the pole, guiding the ox by a stout rope that appears to be growing out of the back of its neck; there are recalcitrant oxen being dragged by the horns; sportsmen with bows and arrows, and prancing horses and soaring birds, and princes blandly smiling while

simpering ladies fan them—all executed with a sort of childish ingenuousness quite different from those elsewhere, which makes them very entertaining.

The next climb brings you to a tumbled mass of fallen stones; the remains of the sanctuary, whose western side, completely ruined, has been piled up as well as may be into some sort of semblance with the rest, making at the same time some easily climbed steps to the top. Nature has crowned the highest point with a lusty group of trees; and when I last visited it, some bold spirit had climbed the tallest of them and tied a bamboo to the topmost branch—as reward for which I devoutly hope that all his prayers were answered! He certainly deserved it.

Another day, perhaps more idly inclined, may find you wandering among the less prodigious buildings on the eastern side of the 'Place'. The ten laterite towers might attract your attention elsewhere; but here, overshadowed as they are by so much more august an architectural company, you may possibly vouchsafe them little more than a glance, and stroll on down their long line to where, in the pleasant shade of the trees, a Naga-adorned terrace juts out, inviting you to explore. It leads to one of the two buildings called by the natives 'kleang' or warehouses —why, no one knows. If you mount its steps and sit in the doorway, where a cool breeze blows through from the depths of the forest beyond you will see that though so much of the once lovely building is in ruins, and its fallen stones are all around you, the doorway itself still rises straight and perfect, its rich carving as sharp as the day it was chiselled. The upper part is covered with intricate floral designs and medallions, and at the base on each side, sits a bearded, smiling little man in an ornamental head-dress, with his hands folded before him in obviously pleasant contemplation—as he sat there watching the blood-thirsty sports in the Place hundreds of years ago.

Behind you, beyond a vista of ruined rooms, steps lead down into the mystery of the forest, where ghosts of walls and angles of buildings peep out among the thick foliage; in one corner the waving plumes of a pampas (or similar grass) in full flower, catch a ray of sunshine filtering through

the branches, and shine in the gloom like silver; and if you sit still enough among the sun-warmed stones, the prettiest of Angkor's ghosts—the butterflies—will be flitting all about you.

Prah Pithu, a group of ruins deep in the trees a little farther north on the same side, has something of the same 'atmosphere'. Its decoration is among the most delicately finished in Angkor, and its cruciform terrace, with most of the Naga balustrades still intact, is a pleasant place to sit and dream of the days that are dead. From it you have the finest of all views of the Place Royale. Almost opposite, the Leper King sits high on his private terrace above his six tiers of attendants; beyond is the incredibly long line of Rakshas and Garudas and staircases, and plunging elephants, with the farthest of them silhouetted dead-black against the sun-baked wall beyond: so lifelike that every moment you expect to see one of the heavy-hanging trunks curl upwards, or a great ear flapping to brush the flies away. With them the vista melts into a mass of foliage, hiding the terrace and staircases of the Ba Phoun.

Many scattered buildings and ornamental 'basins' were included in the plan of Prah Pithu, but they are still well hidden in the forest, and not easy to explore. There are great differences of opinion as to its original purpose. Aymonier saw it as an immense Brahman monastery; Moura, on the other hand, put it down as a sort of 'sports club', where gathered the judges and officials connected with the monthly contests—a theory somewhat supported by the native tradition that it was the meeting-place of chess-players. It sounds quite feasible. Are not our turf-clubs, which might be regarded as a modern equivalent, also spacious and imposing? As, for instance, Rangoon, Calcutta, and the sumptious new club at Singapore?

Seen from Prah Pithu (whose name, rather inappropriately for a sports club, is that of a much revered Indian philosopher) the ten laterite towers on the same side of the 'Place' look oddly like some super-giant's chessmen; and always there are glimpses of other buildings beyond: of

straight and clean-cut as themselves, and matching them exactly in colour.

You may stroll, perhaps, beside the two vast reservoirs that flank the Avenue of Victory, where the still water mirrors the dark mass of the surrounding trees. Were these the public baths? It seems most likely. Did the young athletes of Angkor congregate here as those of Greece did in Athens? And was there an Angkorian Socrates to waylay them with shrewd philosophies as they strolled back after the bath across the square towards the elephants? Nothing is more probable. The Khmers were mightier architects than the Greeks; their scale infinitely bigger; their plans more mathematically balanced; and a people that produced so supréme an art may well have produced philosophers—even though nothing of their wisdom has come down to us save what we can read in these stones.

No traveller fails to pay his respects to the Leper King, the subject of so many Cambodian legends, sitting on his private terrace near the Palace, with the whole of his court, carved in six elaborate tiers on the wall below, to bear him company—hundreds of richly dressed little figures (richly dressed, that is, in jewels, with which their arms and the upper part of their bodies are loaded; otherwise their only garments is a tight-fitting 'langouti') holding fans and all kinds of queer-shaped utensils in their hands, surrounding the king himself, wearing his crown and grasping his sacred sword.

Of the city's five great entrances, only three are known to casual visitors. The best known, naturally, is the Gate of Victory, where all the giants that line the causeway have been set up in their places. It is only here that you can see the Devas, or good spirits, blandly welcoming you on the left, and the Asuras, or demons, menacing you on the right, exactly as they were placed by their designers: though if that was the effect they were intended to produce on the intruder, the Khmer sculptors have for once fallen short of their purpose, for the Devas are only rather smug, and the Demons, with their cross faces and mouths turned down at the corners, are more like disagreeable old ladies than angry gods: absurdly reminiscent, in fact, of those

DEMONS OF ANGKOR

The Khmers' would-be terrifying "Demons" are ridiculously like those comic drawings of our respectable Victorian dowagers that adorned the foreign Press in the 'nineties

comic drawings of our respectable Victorian dowagers that adorned the foreign press of the nineties!

I was jogging across this causeway one warm afternoon, when, by one of those odd chances that do so much to add colour to life, there whirled past, covering me in a cloud of dust, a sumptuous car containing the first European I had seen for days—a lone woman, lying back in the luxurious limousine with an expression of utter boredom on her face. The poor lady little knew that her resemblance to the disgruntled demons (at whom she never even turned her head to glance) was truly remarkable; or that, quite irrelevantly, the phrase, 'the sorrows of the rich' came unbidden to the mind of the humble wayfarer that her plutocratic horn had so peremptorily ordered out of her path. And as I pulled up to wait in the shade of one of the buxom divinities, until the dust of her passing should have subsided, it seemed to me that the gifts of these gods of Angkor were perhaps not so unevenly distributed after all.

There is little to choose between the gateways themselves. They are all huge, cavernous 'holes in the wall', designed on a scale calculated to dwarf a cavalcade of elephants. Inside, high up in the thickness of the wall, are two gloomy guardrooms, like those in a Norman castle. The outside is crowned with the massive triple tower from which smile the four colossal faces of the Khmers' supreme god; and the door is guarded, both inside and out, by groups of elephants, whose heads protrude from the wall as though standing in its shade, each holding a bunch of lotus in its trunk.

The two less-known entrances have the added charm of their isolation. The roads that lead to them from the Bayon have been cleared, but at the wall these come to an end; and if you follow the narrow track worn by native feet—and by tigers and other night-prowlers—you are faced by the dark wall of forest which stands as though arrested on the far side of the wide moat, while its foraging parties of weeds and undergrowth creep on among the ruins of the causeway and the fallen giants. Native tradition has named the central eastern gate, 'Thvea-Khmoch'—the 'Gate of the Dead'; and it is thought that it was by this gate (which

pierces the wall about one hundred yards south of the 'Gate of Victory') that the dead were carried out for cremation: a supposition which gains colour from the native name 'Pre Rup'—the 'Turning of the Corpse', given to the temple outside the wall, to which this gate would have led. There are similar 'gates of the dead' at Phnom Penh, Mandalay, and elsewhere.

It is a fitting name for this great portal of Angkor now. It stands deserted and silent, with grass and undergrowth about its feet; and its trios of elephants seem to be pulling their bunches of lotus from the mass of living green. But if you push your way through the tangle on to the remains of the causeway, you will find the mighty fallen indeed. The faces of the kindly Devas, who should have been there to welcome you look up tragi-comically from where they lie half buried, or entangled in twisted roots; one still upright three-tiered head, with four faces to each, seems to be peering at you with one or other of its many pairs of eyes, through gaps in a screen of tall weeds, every time you happen to look in its direction; and cross old faces scowl up at you helplessly from among a mass of rubbish in the bottom of the dry moat, as though protesting at the indignity of the forced bath they must take when their resting-place becomes a rice-patch in the rainy season.

The west gate has, if anything, an even lonelier air, and great faces of its gods are still hidden in their leafy coverlet, save for the tip of a nose or a chin showing through here and there. But the doorway stands up as straight and proud as any of them, from the tangle about its feet, and its ceiling still holds some wooden beams with their carving yet visible. The causeway has vanished; and a faint track winds down a gentle slope across the moat, in which, just here, rice is grown. I shall not soon forget the picture it made of late afternoon, as eight or nine peasant women, all in rusty black, with hands raised to the baskets on their heads, passed in single file under the deep shadow of the huge doorway and out into the sunset. The path they followed, a narrow, winding one through dense forest, brings you out at last on to one of the huge dykes, called by the natives Thral Baray, or lake roads, which at the

farther end still hold a depth of 25 feet of water in this lake, made over a thousand years ago to water the city. The elaborate little temple on an island in its centre, which was a marvel of intricate carving, has almost entirely disappeared; but otherwise the scene is still set for the water-sports and boat races that the populace of Angkor used to watch from the boulevards that ran along the surrounding dykes. From any of the gates it is easy to climb on to the ramparts which take the form, inside the wall, of a great embankment; and a walk along the top offers not only some very interesting points of view, but gives you into the bargain all the joys of exploration without the least risk of losing your way. The path is barely visible, for it leads nowhere, and is seldom trodden by human feet since the first explorers left it. It has so little to distinguish it from any other vague forest track that it is startling to see, framed in the thick leafy screen on its outer side, glimpses of the wide sunlit moat far below—in one place completely overgrown; in another showing the aftermath of a rice crop; or in others, where the water has not yet deserted it, holding a silvery mirror to the crowding trees.

The wall below you, its line true as the day it was built, drops 30 feet sheer from where you stand at its edge; and the straight, clean trunks of trees growing on the lower level, their roots deep in the moist soil of the moat, stand like pillars so close beside the wall that you can touch them, and rear their stately height aloft, towering up to spread their canopy of branches far above that of the trees growing on the embankment. Here and there are traces of a parapet; and at any point, if you look in the deep dust where the path is clear of the crackling crimson and brown teak leaves, you will most likely see the imprint of a great cat's paw. Most decidedly this is not the place for an evening stroll; and still less does it seem so when suddenly you see confronting you among the tangled growth a tall grey figure, still faithfully on guard beside the citadel, of which there is one at each angle of the city wall. He is headless, but stands at his post ready for all comers, his hands folded on the hilt of his heavy weapon—though there

is little left for him to guard except the delicately engraved Sanskrit inscriptions on a stele near by. His companion, less faithful (but who shall blame him, for he is not only headless, but legless as well) leans wearily against a tree-trunk; and to keep them company in their long vigil several smiling ladies still occupy their niches, while others lie in the long grass among broken lotus buds and fragments of leafy garlands carved in stone, entwined with forest lianas.

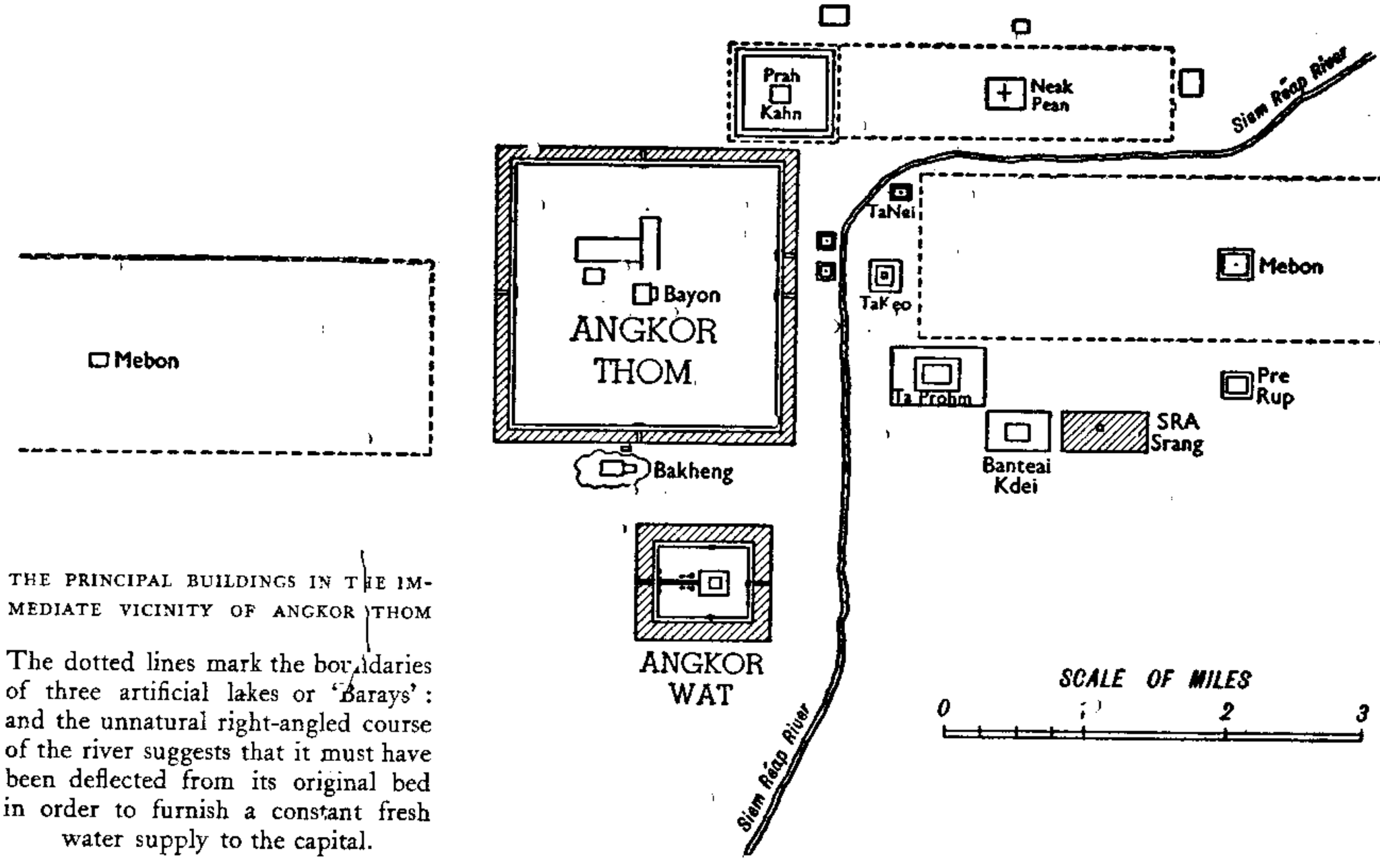
At some corners of the wall, so thick is the growth that has crept up the embankment inside, that it is quite possible to pass the little citadel without noticing it, and find that your next step straight ahead would bring you to earth 30 feet below, the great wall having turned the right angle with as little fuss as though it were a paling fence; at others you see a unique example of the struggle between Man and Nature, where the dark wall of impenetrable forest is held back by the outer edge of the moat, turning the angle as sharply as the stone wall that bounds the inner side.

From the southern rampart you see facing you across the moat the recently uncovered staircase leading to the summit of Phnom Bakheng, with the charmingly named Prasat Baksei Chankrang, or 'tower of the sheltering bird' at its feet. This little temple with its four square tiers of laterite, crowned by a brick sanctuary, might serve for a model in miniature of some of its giant neighbours, and is almost as perfect as the day it was built, though an inscription on its doorway is dated 901. Severe temptation assailed me here one morning when I found among the weeds a delicately carved head of Ganeça, the Elephant God. But small as it was, it must have weighed ten pounds, so I hid it again in its bed of grasses, and came away without offending the temple dieties!

The outskirts of Angkor are as generously supplied with temples as the suburbs of Paris with churches; and when once you can make up your mind to tear yourself away from the old city you will find that each has some special attraction that makes you reluctant to leave it for the next. Both Ta Prohm and Prah Kahn are the perfect

pictured it in childhood; and the immense, frowning pile of Ta Keo induces delicious if rather morbid shudders, because a statue of the bloodthirsty goddess Kali, wife of Siva, makes it certain that here—whatever may have happened elsewhere in Angkor—human victims were sacrificed on the still standing altars. Behind this eerie place is Ta Nei, a small temple hiding so modestly that few travellers seem to find it; and farther east is the Mebon, once an island temple in the centre of a vast artificial lake, where you are startled by the apparition among the trees of life-size stone elephants, guarding its terraces. Then there is Pre Rup, another noble pile of superimposed tiers, where twelve lion-guarded staircases climb to the sanctuary in which, so local tradition says, the ashes of a corpse after cremation were always arranged in the form of a human body on the ground, and where those of the Leper King were brought to rest—the recent discovery of jars full of calcined bones seeming to give colour to these stories. Banteai Kdei, believed to have been a monastery, is less attractive; but its lake, Sra Srang, with Naga-guarded stairs and landings, and the still unbroken line of carved wall, stretching away into the distance, framing the reflection of its forest setting, is one of the most beautiful sights in all Angkor; and perhaps the only one we see to-day little altered since the time of its construction, except that the tiny temple that stood on an island in the centre has disappeared.

There is Bat Chum, a group of three brick sanctuaries where the trees have rooted themselves on the tops of the towers and twine their roots downward to frame the figures that still smile serenely from their niches; and a similar group of five, called Kravan, near by. There is Ta Som, a miniature walled stronghold; Banteai Prei, Krol Ko, and many others. There is the curious Krol Damrei, or elephant park, which the natives say was used by the Khmers to herd their elephants, and a similar place called the Krol Romeas, or rhinoceros park. You might spend days in exploring all of them, and write a long chapter about each. But all this time the Bayon is waiting—though you do not need to explore it at close quarters to make its



THE PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF ANGKOR THOM

The dotted lines mark the boundaries of three artificial lakes or 'Barays': and the unnatural right-angled course of the river suggests that it must have been deflected from its original bed in order to furnish a constant fresh water supply to the capital.

acquaintance. Once in Angkor it is always with you: in the early morning with its hundred giants illumined by the first rays of the sun, shouldering their way up from the darkness that still shrouds the enormous temple below them, as though to greet his coming; at midday, when some of the vast array seem to be blinking in the blazing glare, and others purple-black as though dipped in ink; copper-coloured in the glow of sunset; or, strangest of all, by moonlight, when all the ghosts are walking. Wherever you go, you are conscious of the calm, terrible, giant faces: not looking at you—you are as unlikely to attract that god-like regard as the ant beneath your feet—but gazing sleeplessly out far above your head, smiling their immense, ineffable smile into the infinity of space.

Nevertheless, they will surely draw you to come to closer quarters in the end. And though exploration of this astounding mountain of stone is no longer difficult or dangerous, the Bayon is still an eerie place enough to satisfy the most adventurous. Its plan—as photographed from the air, and reconstructed on paper—is a perfectly symmetrical one of the usual concentric squares; but the connecting galleries are so many, and so complicated by the ruins of others, that you lose your bearings from the moment you set foot inside one of the enormous doorways.

The Bayon is the exact geometric centre of the city, to which run four straight avenues from the gates placed midway in each of the outer walls (the fifth, the Gate of Victory, being designed solely to give effective approach to the Royal terrace and palace, farther to the north). The principal entrance to this immense temple faces east, and is approached by a wide flight of steps leading on to a flagged terrace surrounded by a Naga balustrade. Several stairways, all guarded by pairs of lions, lead down on each side to square, sunken basins or baths. A huge corridor opens into the outer collonade, on whose inner wall and that of the gallery above is the extraordinary series of bas-reliefs to which we owe most that is known of the every-day life of the people who once inhabited Angkor. The charm of these 'picture-galleries' is that they do not only run straight round a four-square wall, but climb up hill

and down dale, along short stairways and porches and vestibules, often pursuing the same theme as they go. The scenes follow each other bewilderingly with no division between them; princely figures, surrounded with slaves waving elegant fans, turn their backs contemptuously upon a cockfight in progress next to them, while the punters reach over the rival owners' shoulders to place their bets, taking the money from a basin carried under one arm; a woman in the market is busy cutting a large fish in halves; hard by sit two others deep in gossip (of a scandalous nature, to judge by their gloating expressions); princesses take the air in boats manned by many rowers, under the shade of trees loaded with fruit and flowers, with birds flying among the branches; and never a boat is launched by the Khmer sculptors upon their carven waters, but those waters abound with fish whose every fin is delicately chiselled, as though to leave no doubt as to the element depicted. Other boats are engaged in desperate combat, and here and there a vanquished enemy is thrown overboard to sink among the fishes, or a touch of drama is added by a curly, horribly life-like crocodile, seizing some luckless fish by the tail. Then, with the fishes swimming and sea-weeds waving just over their heads (for the scenes are packed as closely above one another as they are side by side) comes an interminable procession. It is led by elephants waving their trunks aloft, and each ridden by a Personage, standing upright in the shade of a parasol held over him by slaves. Following are attendants waving fans and banners of peacocks' feathers, and parasols made in tiers, garlanded with flowers. Next, a band, playing instruments almost exactly like those still in use to-day; and, raised high on a platform borne on men's shoulders rides the many-armed figure of a god, whose high priest follows in a shaded hammock. Files of soldiers in close formation, armed with spears, march past, with here and there an officer on a prancing charger, waving his sword. Banners and flags and parasols are everywhere; crowds line the route and bring up the rear . . . and then, without warning, we are in a quiet rice-field, where two peasants work among their crops; and just beyond, a bear-fight is in progress.

A king is being attacked by elephants, one of which he has thrown and is holding down helpless with his left hand; farther on the same mighty hunter deals in the same way with a lion, and in both scenes crowds, carrying parasols, look on in evident admiration. Religious and mythological scenes and episodes from the legends found in the Indian classics, are interspersed among these everyday scenes; dancing-girls flit in and out of the endless pageant here and there; and a woman's orchestra (thus proved to be by no means an innovation due to our modern feminists) plays before a group of noble ladies, who wear the bored expression proper to their rank, and a diversity of ornate head-dresses. There are women meditating and praying; others contemplating their charms with a satisfied smirk in a hand-mirror; and yet others humbly threshing or winnowing rice just as their descendants do it to this day. There are workers in a forge; a cremation scene; a stag carried home by the huntsmen, its feet lashed together, hanging from a pole. Then, as suddenly as we left them, we are back in the midst of battles; in a maelstrom of flailing arms and weapons, of struggling men and trampling feet and hooves; of victors brandishing spears and of vanquished trodden horribly underfoot; all in an inextricable tangle that yet is chiselled with such detail that you can see distant scenes between the spokes of the rolling chariot-wheels.

There is movement, pulsing with vigour and vitality, everywhere; a sort of tense excitement pent up in it all, which holds you entranced and tireless in this unique collection of thousands upon thousands of snapshots in stone. Until perhaps, with a sudden start, you realize that they are only grey old stones after all—that the shadows are deepening, and you are alone in the haunted ancient place; and that all this life that seemed to be around you, at which you have been looking on, was dust centuries ago, with that of those others who immortalized it for you here. And you wonder where they went—what became of them—all those strong, slender, inspired brown hands whose owners stood here where you stand, hour after hour, patiently chipping away at the sandstone, transforming

the blank walls of this enormous temple into the most extraordinary series of living pictures the world has ever seen . . . and that at a time when our own ancestors had just about enough manual skill to make a ploughshare.

In the courtyard enclosed by this lowest gallery are (or rather were, for they are ruined almost beyond recognition) two of the auxiliary buildings which were so favourite a feature of the Khmer plans. And the second storey of the huge pyramid is enclosed by another system of rectangular galleries—this time on all sorts of different levels joined by stairways; but the endless series of pictures on the inner wall flows tirelessly on up and down them all.

And then at last, climbing through a chaotic confusion of half-ruined courts and porches and galleries, every square inch of which is covered with carving, you come out on to the indescribable series of terraces that wind about the enormous four-faced heads, and you creep round the level of their necks, feeling much as a fly may feel when it intrudes too near to a human countenance, expecting vengeance every moment in a slap from a giant hand. If your nerve does not fail you to explore further—and if you happen to find the way (which you will probably do one day and search for in vain the next) you may come upon the holy of holies: a dark, empty, oval chamber in the heart of it all, like a black spider in his web, surrounded by a dozen or so small chapels connected with narrow galleries: a maze about which you wander more bewildered every moment, marvelling that anything so unbelievably intricate should ever actually have been worked out, drawn to scale on palm-leaf, and brought into being by such puny means as human brains and human hands, all those hundreds of years ago.

I never pass out through one of the great doorways of Angkor City, without trying to imagine the last scenes in the drama to which they must so certainly have been the setting: which the great faces above them must have watched, and yet smilingly refuse to disclose the story: the hardest of all scenes to reconstruct, as the finale of a play is the hardest to write. For how, in terms of sober fact, could a city, probably far more crowded than London,

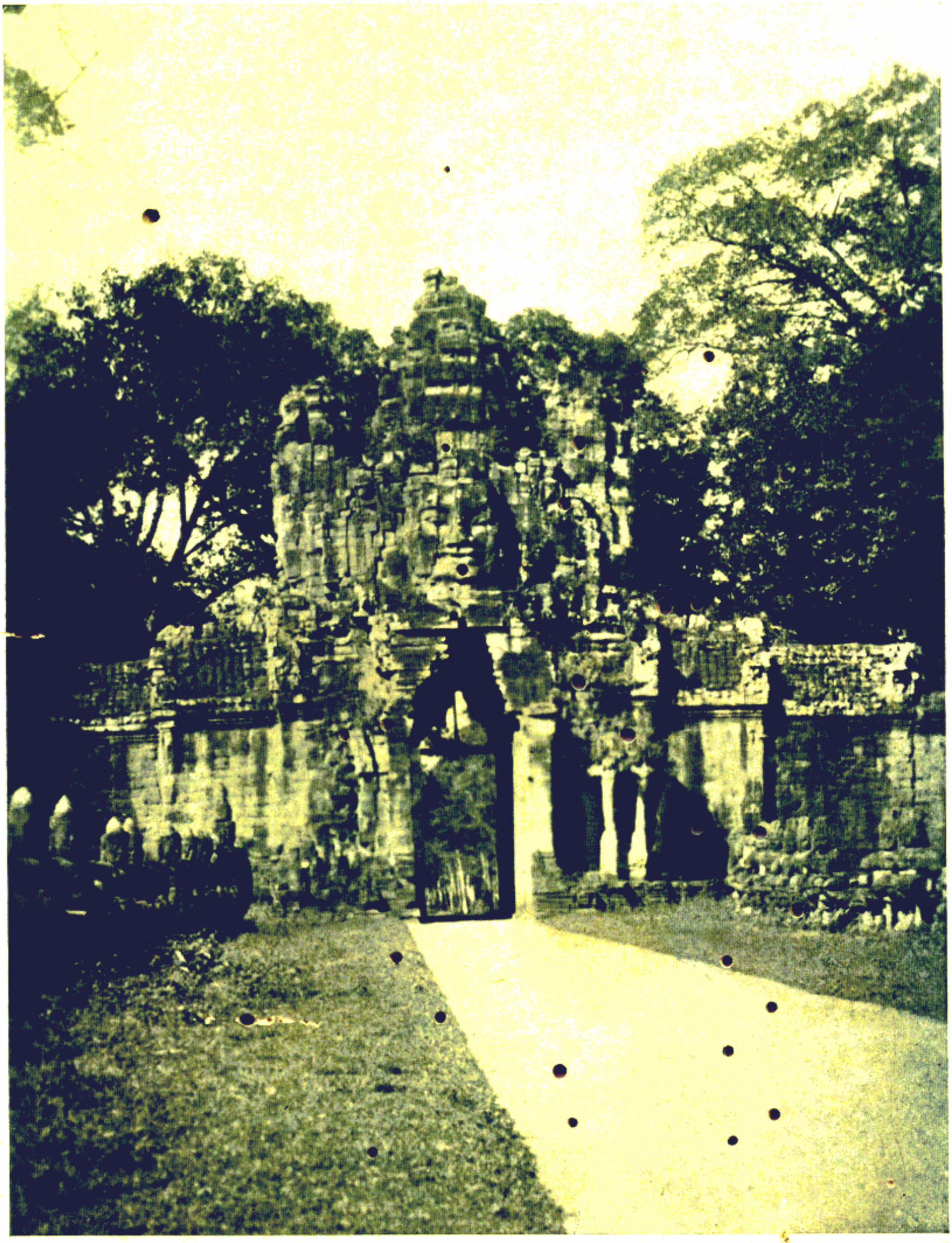
be completely emptied and left to the mercy of the jungle? How would a population of hundreds of thousands have set about 'abandoning' it? To the Western mind it seems impossible to imagine them pouring out, like tea out of a pot; yet Burmese and other Eastern history proves even that to have been feasible, and that the Oriental whom we regard from our superior heights as 'lazy', has the initiative, when it suits him, to dismantle a whole city and build a new one, and even divert a river to water it, with no more concern than we should display on moving to a new house.

But if the Siamese story of the final sack of Angkor be true, the last scenes inside those walls must have been an unimaginable maelstrom of slaughter, pillage, and fire; an inferno of destruction, of yells of triumph and shrieks of terror; a ghastly shambles in which princes, slaves, nobles and concubines, horses and elephants, princesses and dainty dancing-girls, little children and adorable brown babies, were all huddled together in agonized welters of dead and dying—among which the birds, which no conquerors could drive away, hopped and pecked inquisitively. And those gates and causeways must have seen the marching away of long trains of elephants loaded with the spoil of a city so fabulously rich as to be a byword even at the court of China: of chariots full of the fairest of the Khmer woman, spared from death for the pleasure of the victors: and of gangs of prisoners in chains, the pick of the men of all classes, rich and poor, some to be tortured, and some to be the slaves of their conquerors.

And those few souls which the record says were left alive: who and what were they? Too poor and wretched and old, perhaps, to be worth the killing when better sport was so abundant. They would have crept out fearfully from their hiding-places after the last of the conquering armies had marched away, picking their way carefully among smoking ruin and piles of dead—soon to be driven to flee out of range of the ever-increasing, awful stench, the swarms of flies, the packs of pariahs (full-fed for the first time in their lives) and all the other dreadful and sordid sequels to the tragedy.

At last, they too, must have crept out furtively through these majestic gateways, where the heavy hardwood doors, smashed, no doubt, by the invaders to gain an entry, hung jagged and broken from their hinges. Across these causeways, between the files of gods, as indifferent to the last remnants of their own people as they are to us—the pitiful fugitives would have made their way above the crocodile-haunted moat; out to the ruined suburbs, looking for shelter, perhaps, in outlying temples, only to find that they had been ravaged too. Some might have found sanctuary in the Great Wat, of which only the outer façade shows signs of attack by any enemy but time: but most, probably, were scattered far and wide—some to take refuge in humble peasant homes that had escaped notice, others to perish in the forest.

And so the great city was left alone. Gradually, the alchemy of Nature set to work upon the mass of death and corruption. The four-footed scavengers, finding none to bar their passage, came slinking in over these same causeways from the forests, and did their grisly, necessary work. The kindly earth absorbed the rest. The birds dropped seeds on the roofs of the temples, whence the octopus roots would presently reach down and crush them; and slowly, inexorably, the jungle started to cover up all traces of the brief human cataclysm, and finally to blot out the whole glorious episode of the mighty Khmers—so brief a chapter, after all, in the long story of the ages—replanting, in Nature's detached, indifferent way, the forest that had been displaced for a few centuries, by the trumpery arrogance of Man.



A FOUR-FACED DOORWAY IN THE CITY WALL OF ANGKOR THOM

CHAPTER FOUR

THE 'CENTRAL MOUNTAIN'

You can travel for hundreds of miles in Indo-China without the slightest visible change in elevation; and in the Angkor district itself there is not a hill of any sort within a radius of twenty or thirty miles except the isolated, rocky, forest-covered natural pyramid that stands a few hundred yards to the south of Angkor Thom, and is known to-day as Phnom Bakheng. It is the only point (short of chartering an aeroplane) from which it is possible to form any idea of the general contour and characteristics of this country, which was once a rich and powerful kingdom: the only one, too, whence you can see something approximating to a birds-eye view of the mile-square marvel of Angkor Wat; and whence you can comprehend something of the real enchantment of the forest that hides its treasures so jealously from your eyes.

It was not likely that the Khmers would have neglected, or left unadorned with a temple a site such as this, manifestly set there by the gods for that very purpose, and they made most noble use of it. Using the hill itself, which was nearly 300 feet high, as a pedestal, they levelled the top into a plateau; and, reserving an open space perhaps a hundred yards across, on the side facing east, on which to place the introductory terraces and collonades in which their architects delighted, they piled up on the western half of the plateau a pyramidal temple built in five superimposed squares of diminishing size, crowned with a sanctuary, and adorned on each of its sides with twenty-four towers, each a complete and lovely little temple in itself.

The first introduction that travellers nowadays have to Phnom Bakheng, is the sudden apparition, among the silver-grey trunks of the trees on the left of the road, as they go from the Wat towards the southern gate of Angkor Thom, of first one, and then another big grey stone lion,

sitting up stiffly like a pair of watch-dogs on guard, though there is no sign of a building to explain their presence. A closer inspection reveals, in front of them, the remains of a cruciform terrace approached by wide shallow steps; and between and behind them there rises a dead-straight almost precipitous track walled in by tall trees: a track in which is buried what remains of the immense stone staircase that led to the principal entrance of the temple. It is difficult to believe, at first, that the steep stone cliff ahead of you is, for once, a natural feature of the landscape, and not one of those mountains of masonry to which Angkor so soon accustoms you: with their symmetrical cliff-like sides piled up in ten-ton blocks, by some agency that your brain assures you, *must* have been human. . . . And if the Wat was built by mén's hands, then why not this? It seems no more impossible. But even though Phnom Bakheng really is one of the isolated hills that the gods scattered so irrationally here and there about an otherwise monotonously flat country, the feat of building a flight of wide stone steps up each of its four sides, and a huge temple on the top, is a feat superhuman enough to tax the credulity of the ordinary mortal who scrambles breathlessly, with the aid of hands as well as feet, up to the plateau.

Until a few years ago, it was chiefly, if not entirely, for the sake of the view that European visitors to Angkor sometimes took the trouble to clamber to the top of the Phnom; but recently it acquired a new interest of its own. Research has brought to light evidence that robbed the Bayon of its supposedly well-established title to be King Yacovarman's 'Central Mountain', and at the same time made the identification of Angkor Thom with the city he founded, more than doubtful. It then occurred to M. Goloubew, a member of the official archæological service, that Phnom Bakheng being the only hill for miles around, might have been chosen by the king to be the Mount Meru, or Central Mountain round which to build his super-city. There was one virtual certainty to support the theory: the record engraved in the stone of the temple doorway that it had been erected by this same king; a fact

the temple was merely an adjunct (though the term seems ludicrous, as applied to so stupendous an undertaking) to the city of Angkor Thom.

It was decided to investigate to see what further clues might be hidden under the tangled mass of ruins, trees, creepers, and the accumulated leaves and debris of centuries, into which all the flights of steep steps plunged out of sight as they climbed towards the summit, into the shade of its topmost crown of over-arching trees. Working slowly upward through the conglomeration, one by one, five terraces, and innumerable towers were laid bare; and on the highest tier, five sanctuaries so richly carved as to strengthen the growing conviction that this had been a temple of special importance.

Following many more discoveries on the hill itself, a long search of the dense growth on an ever-widening radius from the bottom of the hill was undertaken, bringing to light a number of brick sanctuaries so distributed as to form part of a vast rectangular plan with the temple-capped hill as its centre. Its area was so much greater than that of Angkor Thom as to raise new doubts; but M. Goloubew argued that Yacovarman had founded his city at a period of great prosperity, when his realm (according to an inscription) extended from the borders of China, to Pegu and Champa. He imagined the city as a huge, sprawling place, laid out in a network of avenues, whose four main arteries ran from the terraces at the foot of the hill to the four points of the compass; and having verified many landmarks supporting his theory, he drew up a 'ghost-plan'.

'Archæology' is a heavy-sounding word; but there was nothing dull about the hunt that followed. A truly royal chase it was, in which the huntsmen rode in aeroplanes and on elephants. Flying round and round above the jungle, in 1932, the delighted explorer had the unique experience of seeing an outline of the city whose plan he had first deduced and drawn on paper, take actual shape, faintly but unmistakably, under his eyes, in the green ocean of forest far below. Just as the lines of Roman earthworks are traceable in English cornfields, through waving crops of wheat, so the aviators were able to trace the long series of

sunken reservoirs, following the lines of avenues running from the base of the Phnom; and air-photographs enabled many other landmarks to be located, proving that the city had really existed, and was not the mere figment of a too-ardent archæologist's dream.

The next stage meant 'coming back to earth' in every sense. The avenues that had been so clearly visible from the air were quite invisible on the ground: hidden in jungle so thick that even elephants could scarcely smash a way through it. But after months of toil—much of it in the wet season, when the forests were quagmires—the avenues were all found and cleared: the eastern one leading the explorers to a temple on the river-bank where they were greeted by a smiling, unknown goddess.

Only those who know the jungle of these regions can realize the apparent hopelessness at first sight of such a search. The forest is so monotonous, so impassive; so lacking in landmarks, except where here and there the undergrowth reveals by an added exuberance a richer patch of soil. All around stand the grey, sentinel trunks, of every age and size, from spindly saplings to enormous giants with far-flung buttress roots. Underfoot is the age-old conglomerate of soil and stones and leaf-mould, where in the dry season the last-fallen teak-leaves crackle like metal underfoot, in the spaces between the roots, and where, in the wet season, you will sink to your knees; and overhead and all around a baffling, shapeless tangle of growth, woven together with the lianas that seem to have no beginning and no end, thrown from aloft in a confused jumble like so many giant fishing-lines.

But the hunt went forward nevertheless. Gateways, bridges, roads, and canals, were found one after the other, exactly where, according to the plan, they ought to be; and proofs of human habitation ranging from a big Ceylon sapphire to the cinders of ancient hearth-fires.

A large-scale map was finally made of the vanished city, as the result of another air-survey, in which the aviators noted 800 reservoirs strung out in lines and cross-lines from the base of the hill.

The one disappointment in the re-creation of the city

has been the failure to find any inscription providing definite proofs. But one unearthed on the hill in 1931—a list of dues to the 'God of the Central Mountain'—tallies exactly with another at Sdok Kak Thom, long assumed to relate to Yacovarman's city; and so at least strengthens the belief that Phnom Bakheng really was the 'Central Mountain' referred to.

There must have been some varied chapters in the temple's religious history. Originally it was dedicated to Siva; but a Buddhist inscription dated 1283 was found in it; and, stranger still, one in Arabic, announcing 'Victory in sight and Good News for Believers!' A Mahommedan king, called by the natives Prah Ram Col Say reigned in Cambodia in the sixteenth century; but as Angkor had then been long abandoned, how and why the stone came there is a mystery.

When the Europeans first penetrated to Angkor in the nineteenth century, the plateau on which stands the Bakheng temple was occupied by a Buddhist monastery. But monks and monastery have long departed, leaving no trace behind them but the graves of some of their community, and a huge 'footprint' in stone—presumably of the Buddha—enclosed in a little shelter remarkably like a modern bath, covered over with a sheet of galvanized iron!

It is a relief to turn from the pathetic relics in this melancholy forecourt, hemmed in by dark walls of trees, where all that remains of the collonade that once led across it is a double row of deep sockets in the stone—to the temple itself with its reminders of a glorious past. The climb from the plateau to the highest terrace is made by five steep staircases: guarded by lions, and flanked by exactly matched sanctuaries, each crowned with a tower. The whole effect is one of the utmost dignity, and goes far to convince you that this was once the Royal temple of a great king. But for all its unquestioned beauty, it is less, for once, the wonder of the building than its lofty isolation that charms the traveller who has climbed to this airy goal. The forest temples below are solitary places enough to satisfy however confirmed a hermit: but their loneliness is secretive, a seclusion full of a sense of being in hiding

Mysteries and occult enchantments, and the echoes of strange rites, still cling to their labyrinths of dark galleries and shadowy courtyards; and though you may not be consciously afraid, you are always watching—always on the alert—like a child in a dark room, for the unknown 'Something' round the corner. But here, on the summit of this temple-crowned hill, though you are utterly alone, you not only command the four horizons, but keep a watch upon all approaches to your retreat, beyond possibility of surprise. Its loneliness is the airy solitude of the mountain-top; the forest and its secrets cannot menace you, for you are far above their reach. Your eyrie stands proudly aloft, clear of the tree-tops, dominating the panorama that stretches to the horizon in every direction; an island of safety, high above the tide-mark, with the green ocean of jungle washing harmlessly about its slopes.

This is the most solitary place in all Angkor—and the pleasantest. If it was truly the Mount Meru of the gods, then they chose their habitation well. But if the Khmers had chanced to worship the Greek pantheon instead of that of India, they would surely have built on Phnom Bakheng a temple to Apollo; for it is at sunrise and sunset that you feel its most potent charm. To steal out of the Bungalow an hour before the dawn, and down the road that skirts the faintly glimmering moat of Angkor Wat, before it plunges into the gloom of the forest; and then turn off, feeling your way across the terrace between the guardian lions (who grin amiably at you as you turn the light of your torch upon them); then clamber up the steep buried stairway on the eastern face of the hill, across the plateau and up the five flights of steps, to emerge from the enveloping forest on to the cool high terrace with the stars above you—is a small pilgrimage whose reward is far greater than its cost in effort.

Here at the summit it is very still. The darkness has lost its intensity; and you stand in godlike isolation on the roof of a world that seems to be floating in the sky, among stars peering faintly through wisps of filmy cloud. The dawn comes so unobtrusively that you are unaware of it, until all in a moment you realize that the world is no longer

dark. The sanctuaries and altars on the terrace have taken shape about you as if by enchantment; and far below, vaguely as yet, but gathering intensity with every second, the kingdom of the Khmers and the glory thereof spreads out on every side to the very confines of the earth: or so it may well have seemed to the King-God when he visited his sanctuary—how many dawns ago?

Soon, in the east, a faint pale-gold light is diffused above a grey bank of cloud, flat-topped as a cliff, that lies across the far horizon: to which, smooth and unbroken as the surface of a calm sea, stretches the dark ocean of forest, awe-inspiring in its tranquil immensity. To the south the view is the same, save where a long low hill, the shape of a couchant cat, lies in the monotonous sea of foliage like an island. Westward, the pearl-grey waters of the great Baray, over which a thin mist seems to be suspended, turn silver in the growing light, and gleam eerily in their frame of overhanging trees; but beyond them, too, the interminable forest flows on to meet the sky. It is only on the north and north-east that a range of mountains—the Dangrengs, eighty miles or so away—breaks the contour of the vast, unvarying expanse; and you see in imagination on its eastern rampart the almost inaccessible temple of Prah Vihear.

Immediately below you there is movement. The morning is windless; but one after the other, the tops of the trees that grow on the steep sides of the Phnom sway violently to and fro, and a fussy chattering announces that the monkeys have awakened to the new day. Near the bottom of the hill on the south side, threadlike wisps of smoke from invisible native hamlets mingle with patches of mist. And then, as the light strengthens, to the south-east, the tremendous towers of Angkor Wat push their black mass above the grey-green monotony of foliage, and there comes a reflected gleam from a corner of the moat not yet overgrown with weeds. But of the huge city whose walls are almost at your feet, and of all the other great piles scattered far and near over the immense plains that surround you, not a vestige is to be seen. There must surely be enchantment in a forest that knows how to

keep such enormous secrets from the all-seeing eye of the sun?

In the afternoon the whole scene is altered. The god-like sense of solitude is the same; but the cool, grey melancholy of early morning has been transformed into a glowing splendour painted in a thousand shades of orange and amber, henna and gold. To the west, the Baray, whose silvery waters in the morning had all the inviting freshness of a Thames backwater, seems now, by some occult process, to have grown larger; and spreads, gorgeous but sinister, a sheet of burnished copper, reflecting the fiery glow of the westering sun. Beyond it, the forest, a miracle of colour, flows on to be lost in the splendid conflagration; and to the north and east, where the light is less fierce, you can see that the smooth surface of the sea of tree-tops wears here and there all the tints of an English autumn woodland: a whole gamut of glowing crimson, flaring scarlet, chesnut brown, and brilliant yellow; for even these tropic trees must 'winter'.

By this light you can see, too, what was hidden in the morning: that for a few miles towards the south, the sweep of forest is interrupted by occasional patches of cultivation; ricefields, dry and golden at this season of the year, where cattle and buffaloes are grazing.

The forest still keeps almost all its secrets, even in this fierce illumination. Not even the topmost tower of the Bayon, less than a mile and a half away; not a glimpse of the tremendous city wall just below you; is vouchsafed by the relentless tide of jungle that has submerged the whole kingdom of the Khmers. But there are just two of its half-drowned victims that have succeeded in lifting their proud heads high enough above the surface to be seen in the searching light of the afternoon sun: almost due east, about four miles away, rises the top of a grey pile that can only be the great pyramid of Pre Rup; and much nearer, to the north-east, three towers that are part of the noble crown of Ta Keo.

As for the Great Wat, which in the morning had showed itself an indeterminate black mass against the dawn: in this light, and from this place, it is unutterably magical.

You have not quite an aerial view—the Phnom is not high enough for that; and even if it were, the ever-encroaching growth of trees on its steep sides shuts out the view of the Wat's whole immense plan. But you can see enough to realize something of the superb audacity of the architects who dared to embark upon a single plan measuring nearly a mile square. Your point of view is diagonal: across the north-west corner of the moat to the soaring lotus-tip of the central sanctuary, you can trace the perfect balance of every faultless line. Worshipful for its beauty, bewildering in its stupendous size, there is no other point from which the Wat appears so inconceivable an undertaking to have been attempted—much less achieved—by human brains and hands.

But however that may be, even while you watch it, the scene is changing under your eyes. The great warm-grey mass in its setting of foliage, turns from grey to gold; then from gold to amber, glowing with ever deeper and deeper warmth as the sun sinks lower. Purple shadows creep upwards from the moat, covering the galleries, blotting out the amber glow; chasing it higher and higher, over the piled up roofs, till it rests for a while on the tiers of carved pinnacles on the highest towers, where an odd one here and there glitters like cut topaz as the level golden rays strike it. The forest takes on colouring that is ever more autumnal; the Baray for ten seconds is a lake of fire; and then, as though the lights had been turned off the pageant is over . . . and the moon, close to the full, comes into her own, shining down eerily on the scene that has suddenly become so remote and mysterious; while a cool little breeze blows up from the east, and sends the stiff, dry teak-leaves from the trees on the hillside, down through the branches with a metallic rattle.

There is one more change before this nightly transformation-scene is over: a sort of anti-climax often to be seen in these regions. Soon after the sun has disappeared, an afterglow lights up the scene again so warmly as almost to create the illusion that the driver of the sun's chariot has turned his horses, and come back again. Here on Bakheng,

faintly, mingling weirdly with the moonlight, to bring into being effects even more elusively lovely than any that have gone before. Then, they too fade; and the moon, supreme at last, shines down unchallenged on the airy temple.

It is lonelier now. After the gorgeous living pageantry of the scene that went before it, the moon's white radiance and the silence are almost unbearably deathlike: far more eerie than the deep darkness of morning with dawn not far behind. With sunset, the companionable chatter of birds and monkeys in the trees below has ceased; they have all gone punctually to bed; even the cicadas for a wonder are silent. Decidedly it is time to go. Five almost perpendicular flights of narrow-treaded steps leading down into depths of darkness are still between you and the plateau on the top of the Phnom: the kind of steps on which a moment of sudden, silly panic may easily mean a broken neck—such is the bathos of such mild adventures. And once on the plateau you can take your choice of crossing it among the crumbled ruins, and plunging down the straight precipitous track that was once a stairway—or the easy, winding path through the forest round the south side of the hill, worn by the elephants of the explorers and excavators. Either will bring you to where the twin lions sit in the darkness —black now, for here the trees are too dense to let the moonlight through; and so home along the straight road between its high dark walls of forest, where all sorts of humble, half-seen figures flit noiselessly by on their bare feet, with only a creak now and again from the bundles of firewood they carry, to warn you of their passing. Little points of light twinkle out from unseen houses as you pass a hamlet; and, emerging from the forest to the moat-side, the figures of men fishing with immensely long bamboo rods, from the outer wall, are just dimly visible in silhouette against the moonlit water.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CONQUERORS

I had made up my mind during my first visit to Angkor, that when the day came, as it must, for me to leave it, I would do so by the same road as that probably taken by the conquering Siamese, when they returned to their kingdom after sacking the Khmer stronghold long ago. Nowadays, nothing could be easier, for recently a fine motor road has been built, and Angkor is prosaically linked by a motor-'bus service with the railway at the Siamese border. But a few years ago there were no such amenities, and when I set about planning my expedition, I found myself up against an imposing array of obstacles. Transport from point to point about the scattered ruins had been difficult enough; but to get from Angkor into Siam was infinitely worse. Everyone I consulted assured me that it was impossible; the proper thing to do was to return by the way I had come. But as I was determined by hook or crook to take the other, I doggedly pursued my inquiries in all sorts of unlikely directions.

No one, however, was very helpful. Siam lay somewhere 'là bas', in a direction vaguely indicated by a wave of the hand; and the only visible track meandered inconspicuously away among the trees, looking as though it might peter out at any moment. But that a road to the border existed, I was positive. Some Siamese royalties who had just visited Angkor had come from that direction, and had subsequently vanished again in a cloud of dust; along that track, therefore, I too could and would go—even if I had to walk, or find a native who would sell me his push-bike. But I intended exhausting all other possibilities before it came to that.

It so happened that I had several times had occasion to cross swords with the 'Patron' of the Bungalow. There was no affinity between us whatsoever; and when I put my transport problem to him he told me coldly that to 'voyage

by that route' would be impossible for me: unless I cared to hire his car. But this, he thought, would scarcely suit me—his expression saying clearly that such felicity was only for wealthier and more distinguished clients. And when he named a price which in England would have bought, not hired, a whole fleet of better cars than his pre-War relic, for once I agreed with him: It would *not* suit me!

All the same my enemy had the last word: a Parthian shot to the effect that in that case I had no alternative but to return to Saigon; and I wandered disconsolately away to seek inspiration in the shadow of the Wat. And as I sat there considering the irony of the situation: that I should be so deeply concerned over the problem of getting away from this place, which I had so little desire ever to leave, there came swaying towards me, its enormous cushioned feet noiselessly treading the uneven flags of the causeway, the very transport for which Angkor had been designed—an elephant! Elephants were here for the hiring, I knew, even if motor cars were not. Was this the answer to my problem? The road I so dearly longed to travel had been trodden by thousands of his kind, centuries before even Monsieur le Patron's antique car had been invented. And yet, appropriate though it might be to ride into Siam in the wake of the homing conquerors on a descendant, perhaps, of one of their elephant corps, even my carefree spirit quailed a little at the thought of that hundred and fifty miles of track deep in sand, under a blazing tropic sun, on elephant-back at a round two miles or so per hour. No. Elephant-cruising left me, metaphorically speaking, cold. So did the thought of the same trip on a push-bicycle. And to travel in the time-honoured manner of the country, by bullock-cart, would waste days that might be spent far more profitably where I was.

It seemed that if I was to find a solution to the problem at all, it would not be at Angkor. I should have to go farther afield; to the only town within reach, Siem Réap, where among the Chinese merchant fraternity there must surely be someone who could speak French, and speed me on my way? Yet even this modest trip to Siem Réap presented its minor transport problem; the easiest way of

covering the six kilometers would certainly be by the mosquito' 'bus: a ramshackle old Ford with an obviously village-built body, which I had often seen bouncing wildly along the road, labelled 'Siem Réap' on a roughly painted board. But at what hours, or whence it came or went, no one, least of all the none-too-genial 'Patron', could or would tell me. So after breakfast one perfect morning, I sallied forth and sat down by the roadside (on a block of stone that it is needless to say, was elaborately carved), to wait in the hope that the little 'bus might put in an appearance.

The Wat was in full view, deeply silhouetted against the morning sunshine, and I cared very little if I waited for hours. So it did not seem long before a roar and a rattle and a thick cloud of dust—from the wrong direction—proclaimed the approach of the desired chariot. And as it seemed unlikely that it could be going anywhere except to the neighbouring native village before returning to Siem Réap, I rose and hailed it. It was full, of course. I have yet to see a public conveyance in the Far East that is not. But after a brisk exchange of explanatory gestures, I was politely motioned to the seat of honour beside the driver, which was cheerily vacated in my favour by two native lads, who packed themselves in, amid much good-natured laughter, among their friends behind. Not to be outdone in politeness, I handed round a packet of highly odourous French cigarettes, thus scoring a marked social success. Verbal communication was quite unnecessary. Smiles and cigarettes answer the purpose just as well in Cambodia. And to pay your fare, all you have to do is to display a variety of small coins in your palm, and let the driver make his own selection—in this case a copper cent or two.

I descended at Siem Réap with a slight pang of desolation. Here I was, in a strange town, in which I had yet to discover someone with whom I had a common language, and without any idea when or if the friendly motor-'bus would take me back to Angkor, which had now become 'home', again. And as I nervously inquired of one likely-looking Chinese passer-by after another, whether he spoke French; only to be met with every variety of puzzled ex-

pression of which the human countenance is capable, I regretted more and more that that useful lingua franca Malay, was not in use in the land of the Khmers. It is the pious belief of the protectors of the territory, that the natives and others whom they so painstakingly instruct in French, can all speak and understand that expressive tongue. But that morning proved the belief a fallacy: until at last, when I had almost given up hope, a grave, slim young Celestial, who apparently understood, though he did not reply in words, signed to me to follow him, and guided me to the door of a house adorned with big red and gold ideograms. Here, with a gesture, he invited me to enter, which I did in some trepidation; and passing through a dark, lofty ante-room, we came to another, where several Chinese were sitting round a table, dexterously dipping food with their chopsticks from a bowl in the centre, into smaller ones in front of each of them. My guide said something, and one of the party, an elderly man, rose from the table, bowed, and came with us into the ante-room, where, after a few words, the younger man left us.

The old gentleman showed no sign of either surprise or annoyance that a perfect stranger should come uninvited into his house and disturb him in the middle of his dinner, to make inquiries about transport into Siam—a matter which could scarcely be said to concern him! He listened courteously, without a shade of expression on his face; and then called a servant, to whom he gave some instruction unintelligible to me; bowed profoundly once more, and retired, without having addressed me directly by so much as a single word. The servant, a Chinese, signed to me to follow him; and I did so, with an odd sense of unreality, as though this queer world where communication was by gesture rather than by words, were all part of a dream from which I should presently awaken. I followed up one street and down another in the blazing sunshine, till we came to a patch of shade where a young native was curled up asleep in a dilapidated touring-car. The Chinese servant woke him, said a few words, opened the car door to me, bowed, and departed by the way he had come.

off we set—for what destination I had not the faintest idea. An uneasy qualm assailed me that my elderly Chinese benefactor might possibly have interpreted my urgent inquiry as a desire to leave for the border instantly: in which case I was now en route for Siam with about five piastres in my pocket, and all my belongings left behind at the Bungalow. But as I felt quite unequal to expressing such a complicated situation by signs, I decided to leave the affair on the knees of whatever Gods might be—and devoted all my attention instead to prevent myself from being stunned against the hood-supports, as the car leapt impetuously from rut to rut.

Happily my faith was justified. We were not bound for Siam that morning. We drove down a long avenue, and pulled up at a gate. The driver disappeared; and presently returned with another native youth, who asked in pigeon French if I wanted a motor car to take me to Siam? So after all, everything had worked like a charm! The nice old gentleman had borne me no malice in return for his rudely interrupted meal, and had faithfully transmitted my message. Everything now looked like plain sailing. The young man (so he said) had a car, a very good car, a Citroën, and would take me to the border whenever I liked: for eighty piastres—a price only arrived at after a great deal of haggling. It was an outrageous one, of course; but it was less than a third of that demanded by the 'patron'; and, taking into consideration the inexorable law of supply and demand, it was probably the best I could hope for. We fixed a day in the following week; and I accepted his promise to call for me, reflecting that if he failed to turn up I should at least be no whit worse off than I had been before.

I was not destined to ride home in the friendly little mosquito-'bus, for my driver—smiling now, having doubtless struck a satisfactory bargain for his share of the pound of flesh—drove me back to the Bungalow, at a pace more like a very rough canter than anything else: presently to be sent off, still smiling, with one of my cigarettes between his lips and a piastre in his pocket.

Among my fellow guests at the Bungalow, were the

Colonel who had come so opportunely to my rescue at Phnom-Penh, and two bright young American girls, 'doing' a world-tour in their own inimitable manner. All three were eager to share my adventure along the road to Siam: an eagerness I warmly encouraged as representing a saving to me of some sixty piastres. Bless their trustful hearts! They little knew what was in store for them . . . But then, for that matter, neither did I!

The day came. Our suit-cases were packed; and soon after the first long shafts of the rising sun had begun to gild the highest towers of the Wat, a small car containing three young natives pulled up with a jerk in front of the Bungalow. A most disreputable-looking car it was; a decrepit relic of uncertain age and uncertain make; it was minus a windscreen; and torn sections of the hood hung flapping here and there, like the ear-flaps of an old dog who has fought many a good fight in his day. Water was slopping over from a radiator whose lost cap had been replaced by a grimy rag, tied round with string, like the paper over a jam-pot. We looked at each other: and one of us was saying something about 'the comic old 'buses these natives manage to get about in', when the driver, after removing a piece of wire that held the door in place, got out, and approached me with a bland smile . . . It was then, and not till then, that I realized it was in this prehistoric survival, if at all, that we must travel the long rough road to the border. I took a rather nervous glance at my companions. 'How would they react to the 'car' whose hire I had been so proud of negotiating? It was an anxious moment, but I was not left long in doubt. They were all grinning; and a minute later we were all four helpless with laughter, while the chauffeur stood watching us, a rather startled look in his eyes.

Presently we pulled ourselves together, and began to discuss how we had better dispose ourselves. The car was a small four-seater, and with the driver we should be five. However, happily all of us were thin, and we would manage somehow. . . . But then it was that the trouble began. The driver approached me once more, and asked

we must start'. 'Get down?' I asked. 'What on earth are you talking about? They are going with me.' 'But no,' was the reply. 'You only hired the car for yourself! These people cannot go. There would be no room for my Assistant Chauffeur and my Mécanicien.'

'What ridiculous nonsense,' I said. 'Get in and start. If you need an "assistant chauffeur", I'll drive when you're tired; and as for the "mécanicien"—if this magnificent automobile requires any attention of that sort you will render it yourself.'

But not an inch did the fellow yield. 'Always I take my Assistant Chauffeur and my Mécanicien with me,' he said firmly. 'The road to Aranya is very bad. My patron does not permit that I start without them.'

This introduction of an invisible force behind the scenes was doubtless an inspired invention; but that did not help me. We wrangled oh. Either that car would start attended by Chauffeur, Assistant Chauffeur, and Mécanicien, or it would not start at all . . . and back we should have to go to Saigon, ignominously defeated. And so at last, as we four were of one mind in our determination to get through by road into Siam somehow, we shrugged our shoulders and gave in. The three natives took the front seat; and we packed ourselves as best we could into the back, with the luckless Colonel and one of our suit-cases (the carrier behind only precariously holding three of them) wedged in purgatorially among our tortured feet.

Over our horrible discomforts of that day, memory has happily drawn a kindly veil; and anyway the situation was too ridiculous to be taken seriously. We were bruised and grazed on jagged, rusty excrescences that seemed to stick out all over the car's body, and on the broken springs that pushed their way through the seats; on the corners of the suit-case, and on each other's weary bones. Our legs were cramped until we had to stop the car from time to time, in order to get out and change positions. We were soaked with perspiration and grimed with dust. . . . But 'joy cometh in the morning'; we had our revenge.

At midday we stopped at Sisophon, for lunch at the rest-house. Looking over the old car while we were waiting,

marvelling more and more that despite its looks it should have brought us thus far without mishap, I noticed that the exhaust-pipe was hanging, as it were, by a thread. Here was the very chance I wanted, to put the 'mécanicien' to the test; to find out whether, under the disguise of bright blue blazer, smart white drill trousers, and 'co-respondent's' shoes, he was really a mechanic at heart after all. I sent off a boy in haste to fetch him from the native restaurant into which the precious three had disappeared, and on his arrival, told him to get under the car and put the loose connection to rights.

He hitched up his perfectly creased trouserings, and bent down gingerly, looking everywhere but in the right direction, dabbing at the car here and there with an obviously inexpert, tentative finger. I watched for a while; then decided that the time had arrived to deal with him. 'So you're a "mécanicien", are you?' I thundered. 'I thought as much! You've had a free ride so far, my lad; but now, here you stay till the car comes back and takes you home again. And you can have the 'assistant chauffeur' (and the chauffeur as well, if you like) to keep you company!'

He turned a horrid greenish yellow, and began to cry. So did the chauffeur and the assistant chauffeur, who shortly joined the party. They all three wept and implored and whined, until, from sheer disgust, I gave in again. We had got so far, after all; and I was a little uncertain as to what complications might ensue if I decanted a couple of natives in a strange town. It might be a serious crime in Cambodia, for all I knew. So after lunch off we set again in the same order; with the difference that now the trick was discovered, the infuriating insolence of our driver and his friends was transformed into a cringing humility. And though we did not know it, the best was yet to come.

We arrived in due course at the frontier, where there is a police-post, consisting of a few small wooden buildings. Here we were stopped and our passports examined by the French officer in charge. All were in order until it came

told; and though it was very evident that the young officer had but a poor opinion of the way in which we had handled the situation, we were soon avenged. 'Be tranquil,' he said soothingly. 'Your mécanicien will not look quite so *coquet* when he goes back to Siem Réap with the next police-transport, after a few days in the lock-up! He is probably a criminal trying to escape by the back door into Siam. But I assure you he will soon wish he had never tried!' And he fixed the wretched lad with a glare so ferocious as he was handcuffed and led away to the tiny guard-house, that we could have found it in our hearts to be sorry for him even then, had it not been for the aches and pains and bruises that reminded us too acutely of all that our stow-aways' bluff had cost us.

The policeman next turned his attention to the chauffeur, putting him through a cross-examination that reduced him almost to gibbering imbecility, and acted upon us, his victims, like balm, both physically and spiritually. Every minutest detail of his dossier was written down—upon the printed forms that strike such terror to the native mind; and he was told that full details of the affair, and his part in it, would be wired to the police at Siem Réap, who would be awaiting him on his return. We then paid him, on the police-officer's advice, and he was made to sign a receipt, a duplicate of which was retained by our new and powerful ally. And as a last gesture (for though he had identification-papers, his presence too was suspicious) the 'assistant-chauffeur' was detained in custody until such time as the chauffeur should have taken us to the rest-house on Siamese territory, a mile or so further on, and returned for him. After this the gate that marks the frontier was thrown open, and we passed through, waved on our way by the friendly official, to whom our absurd adventure had undoubtedly come as a welcome diversion in a monotonous and lonely life.

The lights were just beginning to twinkle through the dusk when, driven by a chauffeur so pitifully cowed that we could scarcely recognize him, our ancient rattletrap came to a stop at last in front of the rest-house. Thankfully we disentangled ourselves for the last time, clambered stiffly

out of our chariot of unhappy memories (though we had to admit that at all events the poor old car itself had done its best by us), and unloaded our dust-laden suitcases. In another minute the Citroën and its driver were disappearing in the gathering darkness; we had parted from both without a pang, or a gesture of farewell.

We turned and looked at each other. Perhaps it was sheer fatigue, or a touch of hysteria, or the forlornly disreputable appearance that we presented; or it may have been a mixture of all three. Anyway we all burst into peals of laughter, and laughed and laughed until we could laugh no more.

We were so weary that we could scarcely stand; so bruised that we could scarcely sit; so sore that even the prospect of lying in bed did not promise to be painless. But we had carried our project through. We were in Siam, and we had travelled, as we had sworn to do, in the wake of the conquerors of Angkor. What did a few bruises matter as the price of victory? When the Gods had been on our side, and after sore afflictions, had delivered our enemies into our hands?

CHAPTER SIX

RISE OF THE CURTAIN

To assert that so stupendous a 'discovery' as that of Angkor was due in the main to a matter of temperament, sounds on the face of it merely ridiculous. Yet so in actual fact it was. Henri Mouhot, the man who revealed the existence of these extraordinary ruins to the world, was not the first nineteenth-century European to visit them by any means, nor even the first to describe them; but he was the first who possessed the vision and the ability to convey to others something of the marvels he had seen, and who, by his own burning enthusiasm, was able to set a spark to the sluggish public imagination. Thus it is that Mouhot, rather than any of those who went before him, is remembered and quoted as the 'discoverer' of Angkor.

The Christian missionaries in Cambodia were well aware of the ruins. But they lived under difficult conditions, hunted from pillar to post by native officials and in constant danger of their lives; so that even if they had been so disposed, they may well have been too much concerned with the preoccupations of everyday life to hack their way through forests in order to explore within the walls they had seen from the distance. Only one of their number, Father Bouillevaux, who passed that way in 1850, ever mentioned these amazing evidences of a great civilization; and he cast a jaundiced eye upon them, dismissing them coldly as 'pagan temples—the work of idolators'. But he lived to regret his supercilious attitude; and nearly a quarter of a century later, after enduring for years the irritation of hearing Mouhot acclaimed as Angkor's discoverer, he wrote a book [1] in which he announced that in an earlier work, now out of print, he had briefly described the ruins. He tactfully refrained, however, from quoting

[1] *L'Annam et le Cambodge*, Bouillevaux (V. Palmé, Paris, 1874).

his description: nor was the mysteriously complete disappearance of the original book accounted for.

He then proceeds: 'I must protest against the exaggeration and charlatanism that claims marvellous "discoveries" in Cambodia. Angkor was not discovered by Mouhot as they say. He saw it after several others—in particular, after ME! His journey was given great publicity, and made the place known to many; and those that followed him studied the monuments in a special manner. . . . That is true: but do not let us exaggerate! . . . I shall now describe the journey I made in 1850': and there follows a description of the ruins—but you feel that the writer's heart was not in it. It could not have been easy to look back twenty-four years, and pretend enthusiasm over buildings at which he had scarcely vouchsafed a glance. The worthy father's zeal spent itself in the spreading of Catholic Christianity; and it is evident that to a man of his type the sight of an abandoned Christian mission was more moving than a dozen Angkors. There is real emotion in his description of 'a place that was once the seat of a Bishop and many missionaries. But now, Bishop, Church and Priests have all vanished; a temple of Buddha stands where once stood the temple of the Most High, and worshippers of the Devil replace the disciples of the True God!' Which is precisely what some wandering Brahman might have said on passing one of the temples where his gods had been overthrown and Buddhas set up in their places. And one is tempted to suspect that if he could, the Christian priest would have cast out the images of the gentle Buddha with just as much zest as any of the other religious bigots who went before him!

Bouillevaux spared no pains to reverse the effects of his luckless lack of enthusiasm for the 'Devil's temples'. He enlisted the sympathy of the Marquis de Croizière, president of the newly formed 'Société Académique Indo-Chinoise de France', in the first number of whose *Memoirs* [1] Bouillevaux was acclaimed as 'the first to visit and describe Angkor', and he himself once more voiced his passionate protest. 'For more than ten years,' he wrote, 'they have been saying that Mouhot discovered Angkor. It is false!

[1] *Memoirs*, 1878.

I visited these ruins in 1850, as I have described above. I made a few notes which I had printed on my return to France in 1856. And when he went to Cambodia, Mouhot had a copy with him in his baggage! That intrepid traveller was a man of merit, and died a victim to his love of science, it is true. That his memory should be honoured is well. But he did NOT discover Angkor!'

So there, for anyone who cares to know it, is the true story of the first European in modern times to visit Angkor, but who lacked the eyes to see it. And that is why, despite his protests that he 'got there first', he will never be remembered as its discoverer.

The next European to report a visit to Angkor was D. O. King, who in a letter read at a meeting of the Geographical Society in 1859, described the Wat in so colourless a style as to account for the lack of interest it aroused; and his letter is only of interest for its wild misstatements—as, for instance, that no trace of the ancient capital remained except the Nokon temple, spared from destruction when the city was taken by the Cochin-Chinese about A.D. 200.

It is more difficult to understand why no notice was taken of another paper, compiled by J. Campbell, R.N., from notes by E. F. J. Forrest and Dr. S. R. House, which was read at the same meeting; unless it was that Mouhot had set out a year earlier, under the ægis of the Society, with the avowed object of visiting the ruins. Dr. House was an American missionary, long resident in Siam, who in 1855 had provided material for a map of the lower Menam River. His description of Angkor is vivid and full of interest, and had it been given the same publicity as Mouhot's, it could scarcely have failed to catch the public imagination; though lacking Mouhot's brilliant drawings, it must have lacked some of his appeal.

Such was the extent of the available information concerning Angkor, before Mouhot's account started the hunt for clues that has been going on ever since. But though Mouhot's name is remembered, he has become almost as mythical a figure as the vanished people whose city he describes. One recent travel book contains a highly

coloured description—which purports to be historical—of the explorer's journey, wherein he is pictured making long imaginary entries in his diary, reiterating his unalterable conviction that the jungle through which he is travelling is virgin, despite the absurd stories current among the natives, of hidden cities. And the reader gathers the impression that when Mouhot did catch his first glimpse of Angkor, he could scarcely have been more astonished and incredulous if he had seen the Eiffel Tower!

It would seem to be scarcely worth while to write an imaginary story around a journey concerning which the true facts are easily ascertainable, and far more enthralling than any fiction. Mouhot himself kept a detailed diary of his adventures, which his brother published after his death; and illustrated as it is with countless sketches, is one of the most delightful travel books ever written.

Henri Alexandre Mouhot was only 35 when he died in the jungle, eighteen months after his expedition to Angkor, but he had crowded into his short span a record worthy of a man twice his age. He was a fine linguist; and at 18 went to Russia as a teacher of French and Greek, soon acquiring Russian and Polish. He became known both as naturalist and artist, and after Daguerre's invention of photography, Mouhot was one of the first exponents of the new art, travelling all over Europe with his brother Charles, photographing the masterpieces in picture galleries. Both brothers married Englishwomen, and settled in England, Henri later moving to Jersey. There, one day, Fate took a hand. Someone lent the young artist-scientist a book on Siam; and from that day forward he had but one desire: to explore the then almost unknown Indo-Chinese peninsula, and discover whatever treasures, natural or archæological, might be hidden there. He was fortunate in that his wife was related to the famous scientist, Mungo Park, enabling him more easily to reach the ear of the London Geographical and Zoological Societies, and interest them in his project. And with their encouragement, he set out in the spring of 1858—destined never to return. He attained his heart's desire, but he paid for it with his life: dying of fever at his camp in

Laos in November, 1861, alone but for his two devoted Chinese servants.

He set out from London in a small sailing-ship on 27th April, 1858, and arrived at Singapore on 23rd September: a fit prelude to the many weary journeys that lay ahead. After a few days he sailed on again to Bangkok; and before long was presented to the King of Siam, and was deep in the study of the Siamese language and records: among them a sketch of the country's ancient history written by the previous king [1] of great interest to students of Angkor. 'Our ancient capital, Ayuthia,' wrote the king, 'was, up to 1350, the ruin of a city belonging to Kambuja (now known as Cambodia) whose people then ruled Southern Siam.' The record goes on to relate that Ayuthia [2] was rebuilt in 1350, by a great Siamese conqueror, who brought all this territory as well as part of the Malay Peninsula, under his sway. So that it is well within the bounds of probability that this warlike U-Tong-Rama-thi-Bodi was the conquering king whose armies finally sacked and laid waste Angkor the Great.

Mouhot began his explorations by sailing up the Menam to the abandoned capital, and there sketched and photographed its ruins: his photography being no mere matter of taking snapshots on a roll-film, but involving all the cumbersome paraphernalia of the then new 'wet-plate' process. He next explored the islands between Bangkok and Chantababoun, sailing on from the latter place with some fishermen to Komput, the principal 'port' of Cambodia—a nine days' trip in a tiny boat. Here he was cordially received by the king, who had come to review his 'fleet'; and found the genial monarch (whom he describes as 'sixty, short, stout, good-natured and intelligent') reclining on cushions in his boat with four oarsmen and a dozen young girls, one of whom 'would have been reckoned a pretty girl anywhere. She was, I fancy, the favourite, for

[1] Published in the *Chinese Repository*, and included in *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, Browning. Quoted by Mouhot, in his Journal, *Travels in Indo-China*, Henri Mouhot (John Murray, 1864).

her costume was richer and covered with jewels. She sat next the king, and seemed to pay great attention to her old adorer'.[1] Needless to say, Mouhot the artist did not fail to draw a portrait of this seductive houri—and very charming she looks!

The narrative flows easily on, packed with incident and illumined with humour, unwinding before the reader like a delightful film. Mouhot was a master of description; and the word-pictures that are scattered throughout his careful record are as vivid as his clever drawings. There are sketches of the caravan halting in the wilderness or camped for the night; of elephants bathing, climbing, or on the march; of monkeys hanging in a living chain from a tree to torment a crocodile; of rope-dancers, peasants planting rice, and a member of the king's female bodyguard. There is a portrait of the artist himself in camp, drawing-board on knee, while his servants prepare supper by the light of a torch tied to a sapling: one stirring a cooking-pot hung from a bough over the blazing fire, and the other grilling a trio of fish. A scene that comes vividly to life as he writes: 'Every evening I shall talk to you, my friends. You are the companions of my journey, to whom I shall confide my impressions and my thoughts—scribbled generally by the light of a torch, on my knees at the foot of a tree; . . . if some kind person takes charge of them, and they be destined to see the light.'

He tells us of Deng, his servant, whose one little failing was that he sometimes took a drop too much, and would suck through a bamboo the spirits of wine in which specimens were preserved—until the day when 'assailed by unbearable thirst' he took a hasty draught of ink, which proved a complete cure! This same servant would fish in the streams near which they camped 'with a spear in one hand and a torch in the other—a weird figure easily taken by the natives for a demon', while 'the bats flapped round the torch, and the moon shone through the trees, making patches like bits of white paper on the ground '.

Mouhot was singularly modest—and modesty is not a common attribute of brilliant young Frenchmen in their

[1] *Travels in Indo-China*, Henri Mouhot (John Murray, 1864).

early thirties. He says not a word of his own attainments, nor of how he became so proficient in the Cambodian language as to compile a vocabulary; and in Chinese, from which he translated a number of tales. He also collected and described many hitherto unknown animals, birds, fish and insects, and made many valuable geographical and meterological records. His chief concern was always for his collections, whose transport—especially the rare insects—shaken about on the backs of elephants, or in crazy river-boats, was a matter of great difficulty. 'Those who see specimens in museums seldom think of all the anxiety before they are safely brought home,' he remarks, in one of his torchlight soliloquies. And after all his care, a great part of his treasures, consigned from Bangkok before his final expedition, were lost when the steamer carrying them sank outside Singapore. But Mouhot wasted a bare three lines in recording the fact, and at once set about replacing as many as he was able. They were brought to him wherever he went by the natives, who 'always proffered them at the end of a stick '.

Once and once only Mouhot travelled in luxury: when he fell in with 'an amiable official of Bangkok who had been to fetch a white elephant from Laos for the king', and who allotted two of the sixty elephants in his caravan to Mouhot. At every halt the white elephant was fed by two state officials with a variety of cakes on golden dishes; and on arrival at the capital, the king came out in state to meet the cavalcade. The sacred animal, however, shortly afterwards succumbed—to what Mouhot diagnosed as acute indigestion.

Much more typical was a journey of twenty-three days on foot, during which his feet 'became like a jelly'. Once he camped for three months, ever on the alert for attacks from man, elephants, buffalo, tigers, boars or snakes, and tortured by ants, mosquitoes, oxflies, and leeches. 'These cruel creatures,' he writes, 'suck our blood night and day. But it is my own choice. I have never been happier than in the profound solitude of these forests. And even if I am destined here to meet my death, I would not change my lot for all the pleasures of the civilized world.'

So at last, following a little stream from the Great Lake, which brought him to an old raised causeway, and thence by a sandy track through dense forest, Mouhot came to Angkor Wat, guided by 'that excellent missionary of Battambong, Abbé Sylvestre'. And at the sight, he 'forgot all the fatigues of the journey, and was filled with delight, as though he had found a verdant oasis in a sandy desert. Suddenly, as by enchantment, he was transported from barbarism to civilization—from darkness to light'.

He made a camp within the walls of the temple, and spent three weeks making plans, sketches and measurements of all the ruins within reach. They must have been crowded weeks, for the details he amassed in that short time, and arranged in a paper intended for the Archæological Society, were astounding; and he found time in addition to make a portfolio full of elaborate drawings. He sought in vain for any historical records, for the inscriptions he found were, of course, unintelligible to him; and to all his queries as to who were the builders of the Wat, the natives invariably gave one of four replies: 'It is the work of Prah-Eun, the King of the Angels'; 'It is the work of the Giants'; 'It was built by the Leper King'; or 'It made itself!'

Despite his boundless enthusiasm over Angkor, it was but an incident—albeit a tremendous one—in Mouhot's journey. He was pre-eminently of those to whom it is a thousand times better to travel joyfully, however painfully, than to arrive; and so, Angkor once explored and described in such a way as might be expected to inspire others to follow in his footsteps, Mouhot's face was set towards new adventures in this unknown country, in search of whatever other rare treasures the gods might vouchsafe to him to find. 'Destiny,' he wrote, 'urges me on.' And not even Angkor the Glorious must hold him back from it.

On the eve of departure he wrote: 'My desire is, not to impose my opinions on anyone, but simply to disclose the existence of these gigantic monuments; to collect all the facts and traditions possible, hoping they may be useful to explorers of greater talent and fortune. . . . I doubt not others will follow in my steps, and, aided by their own

"THE INCOMPARABLE WAT"

The main temple reflected in one of the sacred basins beside the inner causeway

denied to me—will gather an abundant harvest where I have but cleared the ground.'

Shortly before Mouhot's death a curious note of sadness sounds through the journal. He is oppressed by loneliness; and for the first time his entries are bare records of villages and streams, distances and directions, enlivened only rarely with the old humorous spirit, as: . . . 'these Laotian priests are always praying; they make a frightful noise, chanting from morning to night. Assuredly they ought to go straight to Paradise!' The last adventurous entry concerns a tiger, which he 'had the satisfaction of killing after it had killed two poor men and two buffaloes'. After that all entries except a faithfully kept meteorological record, cease; until, on the 19th October, 1861, he writes: 'Attacked by fever'; and on the 29th, in an almost illegible hand: 'Have pity on me, O my God.' He died on the 10th November; and his two faithful Chinese servants, Phrai and Deng, buried him in European fashion—to the astonishment of the natives who had gathered round the camp, whose custom it was to hang the bodies of the dead in trees. They then set out through the long, difficult jungle ways back to Bangkok, carrying all their dead master's possessions, which they delivered safely at last to his friends. So that it is to two poor Chinese peasant boys, born and bred in the wild mountain ranges above Battambang (whom most Europeans would be only too likely to dismiss contemptuously as 'Chinks' or 'savages') that we owe the preservation, through difficulties and dangers few of us would dare to face, of the drawings and descriptions that revealed the marvels of Angkor for the first time to the modern world.

Mouhot's brother Charles paid these good and faithful servants the tribute they earned so well, at the close of Henri's journal, which he edited and had published when eventually, through them, it reached England. But who, of all those in their debt, from archæologist to tourist, ever spares them a thought?—or Mouhot either, beyond his bare name? Yet if those two poor Chinese boys had shovelled all Mouhot's possessions with him into his grave, as they might have done so easily, and made their

way straight home to their native mountains, who knows whether Angkor would not still be hidden from us? It might still lie dreaming undisturbed, like the Sleeping Beauty in her enchanted forest . . . or it might not: . . . that is a riddle that no one can ever guess. But the fact remains that whatever hypothetical explorer *might* have revealed to us this inexhaustible source of wonder and delight, it is to Henri Mouhot, toiling on through the lonely jungle, day after day, and month after month, on feet 'like a jelly', tortured by thirst and leeches and gadflies—and to his two humble followers, that we owe it in actual fact . . . Though, after all, that matters little to the tourist of to-day, describing the 'awful heat and discomforts' of his excursion to his less adventurous friends at home, while he hands round snapshots of himself, posing in sporting attire, with Angkor Wat—badly distorted—in the background!

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GREAT 'FIND'

Angkor was acclaimed on all sides as the greatest 'find' that ever gladdened the hearts of archæologists. And once Mouhot's description had been published, the imagination of many adventurous young men was fired to follow his difficult trail, and see the wonders of the Khmer cities for themselves.

The first was Dr. Bastian, a German, who travelled by bullock-cart from Bangkok, via Sisophon, in December, 1864; and two years later two Englishmen, H. G. Kennedy, of the British Consulate at Bangkok, and J. Thompson, a photographer, went by the same route, by boat and elephant in the wet season. A pair of Frenchmen, Durand and Rondet, followed soon after them; and meanwhile France decided that it was high time to tackle the affair officially, in the grand manner, for Angkor was too splendid a prize to be left to the tentative nibbles of individual explorers. The French learned societies had sadly 'missed the 'bus' in letting Mouhot go without their support. But . . . qu'est-ce-que vous voulez? . . . What was done, was done. Mouhot was dead, and Angkor found. So let them show the world that they could read its riddles!

Science and government walked fraternally hand in hand in France at that moment, the President of the Geographical Society holding also the portfolio of the Ministry of Marine. So there was little difficulty in persuading the Chamber to finance a 'Mission d'Exploration' in 1866. Details were left to Admiral de la Grandière, Governor of the colony, who invited Doudart de Lagrée, then representative of France in Cambodia, to lead the expedition. The party of six, with a native interpreter, travelled by steamer down the Great Lake; thence by small boats up the river to Siem Réap, where they were met by bullock-carts and elephants to take them to the Wat.

Despite government support, and the fact that Mouhot

had 'blazed the trail', it must not be imagined that the way of these explorers who followed him was a primrose path. The only roads through the forests were the rough tracks used by the scattered native population; and to reach any of the ruins other than Angkor Wat it was necessary to hack through the tangled growth of centuries. As for choice of seasons: it was a choice of evils. The wet monsoon had the advantage of permitting boat transport in places, but involved weary wading through swamps feet deep in mud and water, on elephants or in buffalo-carts: which latter had to be conveyed across the rivers by all sorts of dangerous devices. And in the dry season the tracks were axle-deep in safid, and the only water for man and beast was in scum-covered buffalo-wallows.

To add to these difficulties, French travellers had yet another to face. Most of the ruins stood in territory long before conquered by the Siamese; and Siam was anything but friendly to the French, but for whose intervention she would probably by now have absorbed the rest of Cambodia. Hence, when a French exploring party left the Protectorate's territory, they were exposed to all sorts of obstruction by Siamese officials, which could only be overcome at the cost of much time and unlimited bribery.

In spite of all obstacles, one by one the scattered groups of gigantic ruins were discovered. So far as locating them was concerned, the trail, once started, could fairly easily be traced; for although unknown to Europeans, the great buildings were familiar to the natives of each locality. News travels fast among primitive people; and they came in from far and wide to direct the inquisitive strangers to the places about which such strange tales were whispered among them.

The leader of the first expedition, de Lagrée, died, like Mouhot, in the midst of his explorations. But his work was carried on by his companions, and a collection of his notes was put together by Captain de Villemereuil, and published in the first number of the *Memoirs* of the Indo-Chinese Academic Society, in 1878; others of his vivid observations being edited and supplemented by Francis

book was illustrated by another member of the party, L. Delaporte, whose drawings—especially the 'reconstructions' of the ruins as they must have appeared in the days of their glory—awaken regrets that photography should have superseded draughtsmanship in the illustration of books; for no camera could have caught the incidents he drew of the explorers' adventures, nor the weird scenes they watched by torchlight.

The records of the first expedition had no sooner been set in order (a work delayed by the siege of Paris) than another was organized by Delaporte, who was determined to return to Cambodia and bring back to Europe enough specimens of Khmer carving to prove to the Western world that the new 'find' was (as Fergusson later claimed in his *History of Architecture*) the greatest event in the history of art since the Assyrian discoveries. Fortunately Delaporte was given full powers to carry out his project; and the ultimate result was the Khmer museum in Paris.

Exploration had been adventurous enough, but it was a mere picnic compared with the collection of such specimens as these. Native guides did their best to put the travellers off with terrifying tales of 'neak-ta' or evil spirits, who would be sure to molest them in the form of ferocious tigers, if they dared to profane the temples that were their chosen places of abode. But by some means or other, they were persuaded not only to help rob these haunted places of their gods, but to transport them on the first stages of their journey to France. And unique feats of transport they were—happily immortalised by the artist in some of his liveliest drawings. The statues were hacked out from entangling roots, or dug up from where they lay embedded in the bat-droppings of centuries; then lashed on to platforms of crossed branches and carried on the shoulders of a score or so of men, along paths hewn ahead of them by as many more. When a river barred the way, the platforms were turned into rafts, and pushed across by the carriers, breast deep in water. Sometimes the superstitious natives would take sudden fright and rush away, leaving their burden—perhaps a gigantic Buddha—alone in the heart

great weight of the trophies capsized the boats in which they were towed down the great lake, from whose dry bed they were rescued when the waters receded. But in the end, most of them reached Saigon, whence, in one hundred and twenty enormous packing-cases, they were shipped to France.

Since then their career has been—perhaps appropriately—an unrestful one. The great cases first remained for some time out in the cold, while endeavours were made to find space for their contents in the Louvre; and when there proved to be no room for such giant intruders even in those vast salons, they were given sanctuary in the Château de Compiègne. Thence they were transferred to the Trocadéro; and there remained until recently, when the expansion of the Musée Guimet permitted their removal to its galleries; save for one or two of the biggest leviathans—among them the many-headed giant from the causeway at Prah Khan, a trifle some eighteen feet long, weighing several tons—which had to be left behind, to stand shrouded in tarpaulins while the Trocadéro is pulled down about their ears!

It is good, no doubt, that the Western world should see something of the art of a great Eastern civilization. But it is curiously unnatural to see these exiled divinities in so cold and unfamiliar a setting. For they, and the sandstone from which they were carved, have been warmed through and through since Time began by the tropic sunshine; and they seem to shrink and shiver in the bitter chill of northern Europe. The Buddha who greets you from the centre of the Guimet's circular hall, smiles bravely out upon the wintry world, as though doing his best to feel at home surrounded by the full-size prints of the Ba Phoun bas-reliefs, which adorn the walls; but his expression lacks something of its proper serenity. And as for the tall Laksmi, torn from her temple on the summit of Phnom Bakheng . . . quite inadvertently I caught her eye . . . and there rushed over me a host of memories we shared, she and I: of soft silvery dawns and molten sunsets, of which I had seen a few and she so many, before Fate brought us face to face in this cold gallery of Paris, both longing with all our hearts to be back in the hot sunshine, looking out

over the tree-tops to the far horizon. Wife of the God Vishnu: Perfection of Beauty; Goddess of Riches—all these things she might be; but as impotent as I, a poor mortal, nevertheless, to attain her heart's desire!

She has plenty of company in her chilly exile. There is a goddess with twelve heads—eleven of them worn as a tiara round the principal one; a life-size Hari-Hara (the dual god composed of Vishnu and Siva) divided down the middle, head-dress, hair, face, body, dress, and all, to show the characteristics of each divinity; a horse-headed demon in an ornate head-dress; and Siva in many guises. There are also a number of delicately engraved inscriptions, to show the public of Paris how the records of the poor benighted heathen were kept a thousand or more years ago.

Save for these specimens, collected by the members of successive official French 'missions', Khmer art is unrepresented in the museums of Europe. But it is almost unnecessary to say that once the enterprising citizens of the United States had discovered Angkor in their turn, they wasted little time in acquiring trophies. Many fine examples of sculpture and bronze are to be found in the museums at Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, by way of proving how lusty is New World enterprise, compared with that of the Old.

The collectors to whom the museums owe their specimens saw some sights that would rather startle visitors to Angkor to-day. It was nothing unusual for human heads to be stuck up on posts at the cross-roads in Siem Réap. And in the centre of the neat market-square now surrounded with modern concrete shops, Delaporte once came upon a poor wretch pinioned to the ground, his head fixed between two bamboos, writhing under the blows of a heavy whip, while a scribe sat close by, writing down the confessions thus extracted.

The fashion once started, exploring parties followed each other into Cambodia thick and fast. Next after Delaporte's was that of Dr. Harmand, the first to make a detailed study of the Bayon's bas-reliefs. And then came Aymonier, to whom students of Khmer history owe more

than any of those who followed in Mouhot's footsteps. The Pavie expedition in 1879, made some valuable observations, and the work of the English architect Spooner, is often quoted by his French colleagues. In 1887, Fournereau and Porcher went out, accompanied by the sculptor Raffegaud, whose models of many carvings were added to the Paris collection; and Fournereau's *Ruines Khmers*, with its magnificent illustrations, is a standard work of reference.

Tissandier, another architect, visited Angkor in 1893 under the benevolent wing of the French Ministry of Public Instruction. Although more than thirty years had passed since Mouhot's journey, conditions had not yet greatly changed, and he described 'a two-hours journey by bullock-cart to the Wat from Siem Réap along a track deep in sand, through dark tunnels of foliage'. His driver was a slave-boy of 12, who had been bought by his owner for 64 piastres.

It began to be obvious that the work of all these explorers would have far more value if their results were co-ordinated: and accordingly, in 1898, the "Archæological Mission' was organized, which a year or so was given its present name of 'L'École Française d'Extrème Orient'. Its first director, and virtual creator, was Louis Finot (who died recently at Toulon), and for twelve years its work was built up under his control. It was he who proposed Government protection for the ruins, and who organized their preservation and restoration, so far as might be possible.

It was not until a treaty with Siam, signed in 1907, restored to Cambodia the provinces in which the ruins stand, and gave France, as Protector, a free hand, that the work of clearing tracks giving access to the various groups, and the still greater task of disentangling the ruins from the stranglehold of the jungle, was begun on a big scale. This work is of extraordinary difficulty, for the giant roots that coil like nightmare snakes round pillars, and writhe their way along galleries and balustrades as though in mocking imitation of the sacred Naga, have grown to such proportions that often their cruel embrace is the only support that holds the very stones they have disrupted from crashing into piles of shapeless ruin. But with infinite skill

the work was undertaken and is still going on; and although, inevitably, some of the wild beauty of the ghostly temples half-hidden in their rich cloak of green, has been lost, much of their former splendour has been restored to them; and in places sheer miracles have been performed: as when M. Marchal set up in their places the two files of giants beside the causeway of the Gate of Victory, after rescuing them one by one from the tangle of undergrowth and debris in the moat. It is only from the collection of photographs preserved by the Archæological Service of the École Française that any idea can be formed of the work they have accomplished; for the many pictures among them of what appear to be jungle-clad hills, prove to be in reality groups of architecture familiar to all travellers in the region.

The headquarters of the École is at Hanoi, where there is a fine museum and library. The *Bulletin* of the institution was started by M. Finot in 1901, and rapidly became a leading authority on Far Eastern antiquities.

The first 'Conservator' for the Angkor ruins was Jean Commaille, and to him our thanks are chiefly due for saving the incomparable Angkor Wat from the ruin into which it was falling at the time of his appointment. He toiled for three years with no European assistants, dependent for labour upon the local natives, living in a bamboo-and-mat hut, acting as mason, or anything else as occasion demanded; with the result that the danger was arrested, fallen stones and pillars set up again in their places, and the great temple ready again to face the centuries. He next turned his energies upon Angkor city, and under his direction the Bayon, the Palace, and Ba Phoun were brought to view from under the mantle of jungle that covered them. Commaille died in Angkor's service; he was murdered by bandits in the midst of his labours early in 1916; and his work was carried on with equal devotion until 1933 by Henri Marchal, who was then appointed head of the Archæological Service at Hanoi. His successor at Angkor was George Trouvé, whose boundless enthusiasm was rewarded with many valuable discoveries. His death in an accident early in

1936 ended a career of brilliant promise, and is a grievous loss to the Archæological Service.

One of the Conservator's most discouraging tasks—for, like a housewife's work, it is never done—is that of clearing the 'luc-binh', or water-weed, that is choking the moat in front of the Wat. The growth is gaining ground yearly, for clearing is restricted for lack of funds, and only a few prisoners from the gaol at Phnom Penh work on it. To make it worse, the water is slowly draining away. What a chance for some millionaire visitor to show his appreciation, in defraying the cost of repairing the system by which the Wat's designers kept the water at the proper level! And so give back to the noble façade the entrancing reflection in the moat, that was evidently intended.

While all this activity has been going forward on the spot, a hunt no less keen has gone on in the libraries of Europe. Once Angkor had been identified as the city described in Rémusat's translation of Tchou Ta-Kuan's *Memoir*, long well-known to Sinologues, medieval records were combed in the hope of finding further references to the mysterious place. But the harvest was disappointing. The hope that Marco Polo might have visited it found little foundation. A Spaniard, Gaspard de Cruz, appeared to have been the first European in Cambodia. He went there from the Philippines in 1560; to be followed by a number of his compatriots, who established themselves so successfully in business as to rouse the jealousy of the Chinese, who harried them without mercy until they fled from the country. But no word of Angkor appears in their records.

The next visitors were Portuguese refugees from Sumatra, driven out by the Dutch. Three romantically-named merchants among them did deign at least to mention Angkor. Marcello de Ribadeneyra and Christoval de Jaque claimed to have 'discovered' the deserted city in 1570, and Gabriel de S. Antonio made one casual reference to it. Possibly these three bold spirits made the long and difficult journey into the interior in the hope of finding a flourishing market for their wares; and if so it is easy to understand that the bitter disappointment of finding only ruins instead, would leave no room for more æsthetic

considerations! A Dutchman, Gerard van Wusthoff, wrote of 'the ancient capital' when visiting Cambodia in 1641; and two years later history repeated itself, for all Europeans were driven out of the kingdom—this time by the Cambodians themselves.

Just one record from the seventeenth century rewarded the searchers. Père Chevreuil, a French missionary, managed to evade the eye of the Cambodian officials, and in 1666 wrote a description of Angkor, which was published in the *Relations des Missions Évequ's Français* in 1874. 'About eight days' journey from the village where I live,' he wrote, 'there is a very ancient and famous temple called "Onco". It is as famed among the people of several kingdoms as St. Peter's at Rome. There are to be found their most important wise men, and they consult them and accept their decisions with the same respect as do Catholics the oracles of St. Siège. Pilgrims come there from Pegu, Siam, Laos and elsewhere, in time of war.'

This appears to have been the last record to reach Europe; and early in last century the geographer Malte Brun dismissed the interior of Indo-China as 'a fruitless, empty field of mere conjecture'.

So much for the meagre records. The philologists had a richer field in deciphering the inscriptions found and 'rubbed' by the explorers—above all by the indefatigable Etienne Aymonier, who alone discovered between two and three hundred, containing, as Bergaigne put it, 'a whole literature in themselves.' They were translated by Aymonier himself, by Professor Kern of Leyden, by Finot, Barth, Bergaigne, and Coédès. They are written partly in Sanscrit (which according to all authorities, is scrupulously correct) and partly in obsolete Cambodian, or Khmer. The former is used for all religious matter, and the latter for lists, and any mundane matters not easily rendered in priestly language. The perfection of engraving in both is extraordinary. As an instance of its fineness may be cited the stele of Sdok Kok Thom, found near Sisophon, on which one stone are 132 stanzas of Sanscrit verse, and 146 lines of Khmer, a translation of which, printed in a book of ordinary octavo size, would take up 32 full pages.[1]

[1] Bergaigne, *Journal Asiatique*, 1884.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FAIRY TALE HISTORY

The early history of Cambodia—such as it is—rests on an inextricable tangle of native legends, and Chinese and other so-called 'records'. The story of the origin of the Khmer or Cambodian race appears in many forms in Chinese literature; but the version generally believed in Cambodia itself is that a Prince Prah Thong, son of the King of Delhi, fled after a quarrel with his father, and found himself on the shore of Kok Thlok (one of the ancient names of Cambodia). Here he took shelter in a cave which he was alarmed to find tenanted by a gigantic seven-headed serpent, who proved to be Naga-Raja, the Serpent-God King. The Naga made the exile prince welcome: with the result that he fell in love with his host's lovely daughter, Soma, and married her. The royal father-in-law, in order that the young couple should not lack an empire to rule over, applied his seven great mouths to the waters of the ocean, and drank them up till he had drained the land beneath it dry! Here the Khmer nation was founded to be ruled over by Soma's descendants for ever after.

The 'Naga' figures in many Indian fables as a semi-divine serpent with many heads. Sometimes he is the hundred-headed Sesha, supporting the world. At others he is Vasuki, serving as a rope in the tug-of-war between gods and demons; but in whatever form he appears he is honoured and revered; and more so than ever in Cambodia, where as the traditional founder of the race, he and his kind are regarded as its protectors, and thus are to be found as a prominent motif in all Cambodian architecture and decoration, unaffected by changes in the national religion.

Another curious native legend in this connection followed naturally after the first. It was the firm belief of the Khmers that each successive king must constantly renew his union with the serpent-princess, who appeared

to him every night in the form of a woman. If the king should miss a night at the appointed place, disaster would befall; and when there came a night that the spirit failed to appear, it meant that the king's death was at hand.

The Cambodian story is much complicated by its two separate royal lines (evidently derived from Indian mythology)—one of the Sun, and the other of the Moon. The lunar line was that which claimed descent from the serpent-king's daughter; and the solar one, from a hermit named Kambu, and Mera, a nymph given him to wife by the god Siva. Kambu's name is perpetuated in the name of the country and its people: 'Kambudjas,' or sons of Kambu: variously rendered 'Khmers' or 'Cambodians'. The history of the rival royal houses appears to have been a long drama of wars, murder, and mutilation, between claimants to the throne; and a Chinese historian records with admiration how one king, Icanavarman, protected his crown from usurpation by his numerous brothers, by cutting off a selection of their noses, toes, fingers and ears, and then sending them away to remote and inaccessible parts of the country, where he 'provided generously' for their support!

The earliest known definite historical reference to Cambodia is the record of an exchange of ambassadors between the Khmer court and that of one of the Chinese Won emperors in A.D. 243; and of a Khmer emissary to India at about the same time, who took four years on the way. After that, there are constant references in the T'sin histories—between A.D. 265 and 419—to dealings with the Khmers, who 'paid taxes in gold, silver, pearls, and perfumes'. During five centuries Khmer ambassadors went to China, taking tribute; so that evidently, before its rise to power, Cambodia must have been a vassal State. In A.D. 357 the Khmer king sent a gift of elephants to the Chinese emperor, who refused them on the score that 'they might cause injury to his subjects'—which suggests that quarantine regulations may possibly have already been in vogue; and an ambassador much impressed the Chinese court in A.D. 484 with his account of a mountain 'upon which Siva descends, and where plants and trees never die'.

Chinese annals are full of records of such missions and the kings who sent them; and it is often by their aid that the inscriptions found in Cambodia, bearing the same kings' names, have been approximately dated.

According to Chinese writers, the infusion of Indian influence under which the Khmers rose to such extraordinary attainment in architecture, reached them in the fifth century in the person of a Brahman named Kaundinya, who possessed supernatural powers. And the great Orientalist Barth points out that this superb development of civilization in Cambodia synchronized with that in India in the fifth and following centuries. It was with the south-east of India that there seems to have been the closest communication; and it was doubtless thence that the Khmers derived their alphabet, the names of their kings ending in 'Varman' (which means 'Protector'), and their form of the brahman religion.

In piecing together Angkor's history from Chinese records of the Khmer embassies, it has to be remembered that these visitors communicated what they had to say through several interpreters, all speaking different languages; so that by the time it reached the recording scribes, the information was probably somewhat confused. It is to this cause that Aymonier attributed the uncertainty regarding the ancient name of Cambodia—still a matter of dispute. In his opinion it was 'Fou-nan', altered later by the Chinese to 'Tchen-la', by which name, after a certain period, they always refer to Cambodia. He explained thus one record describing Tchen-la as 'a former vassal State of Fou-nan'—which is contradicted by many other texts, notably that of the Buddhist pilgrim Yi-Tsing, who visited the Khmer kingdom between 675 and 695, and spoke of it as 'formerly called Fou-nan'.

However, that is a matter for the historians to fight out. 'Angkor' by any other name would puzzle and enchant us just as completely!

The next phase is chiefly based on the inscriptions on stone that have been found scattered throughout the kingdom: some marking the angles of lakes, walls or buildings; some quite isolated; and others embodied in the

carving of panels or pillars. But the exquisite scripts that cost such infinite care to decipher, too often only mock the student for his pains. Instead of revealing answers to the riddle, they announce flamboyantly instead that this or that monarch was 'Beautiful as Incarnate Love'; that 'His White Umbrella shaded the Whole World'; or that 'His Toenails were Mirrors to reflect the Diadems of the Kings who knelt before him'. Fortunately, however, these effusions were the preludes to lists of slaves and other gifts to the temples, with the name of the king who sought thus to glorify himself. The oldest found is dated A.D. 526; and the first king to be mentioned is Crutavarman, succeeded by his son Cresthavarman about 539. His capital is thought to have been on the bank of the Mékong, north of Angkor. The next was Mahendravarman, whose son Icanavarman built another capital called Vyadhapura, and earned the Chinese tribute to his astuteness quoted above. In 626 this king's empire 'included thirty large cities and his capital sheltered 20,000 families'. This city is believed to have been near the present Phnom Penh. Then there is a gap of nearly two centuries, until the time of King Jayavarman, who lived in four capitals, of which he founded three—the patiently engraved stones recording all their lengthy names: Indrapura, Harihara-laya, Amarendrapura, and Mahendraparvata. The next two kings left little behind them but their names: another Jayavarman, and Indravarman. It was their successor, Yacovarman, who founded Yacodharapura, till recently believed to be Angkor Thom.

Aymonier's reconstruction of the Khmers' history during the period of their greatness, despite some modifications due to discoveries since his time, remains the best consecutive story of those romantic centuries.[1] The most colourful part of it begins with the long reign of the first Jayavarman, who seems to have been taken to Java in childhood by the invaders whose attacks are recorded. At all events he enters the scene as 'coming from Java'; and to him belongs the honour of having inaugurated building on the grand scale in his kingdom.

There can be no doubt as to the close relationship between the great building period of Java which reached its climax in the eighth century with the erection of Boroboedoer, and the extraordinary development in architecture at about the same time in Cambodia. The idea of the 'four-square' temple with its exactly matched sides most probably reached Cambodia by way of Java; and the series of bas-reliefs that run in a double tier all round the sides of Boroboedoer, representing scenes from the life of the Buddha, seem to be the prototype of the even more elaborate decoration of the same kind with which the Khmer temples are so prodigally adorned. The giant figures, too, were a feature of the Indian colonizers' work in Java which the Khmer genius turned to further account by the simple process of multiplication; and a single clumsy giant became a superb motif when repeated a hundredfold.

There are other proofs of the link between Cambodia and Java. Arab travellers who visited both kingdoms have left records from which it appears that for some time before King Jayavarman asserted his independence, Cambodia had been a vassal State to the powerful Indian kingdom in Java. An Arab named Massoudi, who went to Cambodia in 915, recorded that it was 'much more thickly populated that Zabedj' (Java).

Once safe in his own country, King Jayavarman decided to cast off the shackles of Javanese influence, and to set up a new religious ritual of his own. With the aid of a Brahman named Hiranyadama, he established the royal cult of the Linga, embodying and deifying the kingly power, which was installed with great pomp in the temple dedicated to it in the new capital. This demonstration does not seem to have brought any retribution in its train from the ruler of Java; for the new cult was firmly established and adopted by all the successive Khmer kings for centuries afterwards.

It is not until the year 889 that the stones have anything to say about Yacodharapura—or 'Angkor'. Then, thanks to the bombastic gesture of young King Yacovarman, a whole sheaf (if documents as weighty as tombstones may be so described) of copies of a proclamation announcing

'A Great Event! A Splendid Temple to be erected by the new King in honour of Siva!' were engraved on the usual sandstone slabs, and despatched to the far corners of the realm—making one speculate as to the means of transport provided for the postmen of those days! The King signed his proclamations: 'Yacovarman, King of Kings, Emissary of the Sun. The King with the Eyes of Lotus! Who in all the sciences, arts, and learning, in languages, writing, dancing, singing, and all other things, is as proficient as though he had been their inventor!'

But if native legend be true, the gods did not smile as kindly as they might have done upon this paragon. Certainly he died young, for an inscription in the Phimeanakas, dated 910, gives him his posthumous title, proving that he had by then departed to join the gods. Another stone records that he was peaceably succeeded by his son—suggesting that he died of illness, and not by the battle, murder, or sudden death that was the more usual fate of these merry monarchs. The evidence, slight as it is, thus gives colour to the native belief that Yacodharapura was founded by a 'Sdach Komlong', or Leper King; and if the legend be true, it was probably this magnificent, vainglorious 'King of Kings' who was doomed by the gods to the most miserable of deaths. Aymonier described how natives pointed out to him with awe, a remote valley in the Kulen mountains, where they said the Leper King had been cremated, after living there in retreat for many years.[1] It was native legend, too, that gave the same name to the statue that sits gazing out from the terrace over the great square at Angkor Thom.

In the reigns that follow, the inscriptions record an endless succession of battles: between rival claimants to the throne, and with enemies from outside. In 1177, 'on the fifteenth day of the fifth month,' the King of Champa, with a great army, sailed up the Mékong and took Angkor completely by surprise. The terrified population fled;

[1] A well-known Indian legend relates a similar story of a king of Benares, who, attacked by leprosy, left his throne and retired to the forest

and the victorious army, after pillaging temples and palaces, returned to Champa with enormous booty. The next Khmer king—another Jayavarman—avenged this disaster by inflicting a terrific defeat upon his enemy: recorded in detail in Chinese histories and on inscriptions in Champa—which country now for a time came under Khmer domination. But it was a victory which may have cost the Khmers their existence as a great nation. Wars between the two countries were ceaseless for over thirty years, leaving both sides exhausted and powerless to resist attacks from other quarters. It was doubtless to this period that much of the ruin of the splendid buildings is due, for the inscriptions repeatedly record the destruction of temples and tearing down of the gods within them.

Relations with China seem to have been broken off after the seventh century; but ambassadors were exchanged again in 1107, and honours were bestowed by the Chinese Emperor upon King Suryavarman, who reigned in Cambodia in the twelfth century. It was during this king's reign that the mists, which were finally to veil Angkor from our curious eyes, began to gather more thickly; for from that time the inscriptions on stone became more and more rare. The two that end the story, as recorded by its own historians, are that found at Ta Prohm, recording the victory over the Chams in 1190, and one discovered by Aymonier in the remains of a small temple called Chisoen, near the north-east angle of the moat at Angkor Wat. This last reveals nothing of historical value, amid a mass of flowery verbiage, except the names of four presumably thirteenth-century kings.

Thus the curtain falls; to be lifted only for the brilliant scene of 1296, painted for posterity by the Chinese visitor, Tchou Ta-Kuan.

The 'Pongsa Voda', or Chronicle of the Kings, in the royal library of Cambodia is a history—of sorts—of the centuries that followed.[1] It is a curious conglomeration of long royal titles, dates, and irrelevant stories, and its few

[1] It was first translated by a bonze for de Lagrée and published in the *Bulletin* of the Geographical Society (Paris) in 1871. It was later amplified by Moura, and included in his *Royaume de Cambodge*.

brief references to Angkor often conflict with Siamese records. We read that a king named Prah-bat-somdach-prah-barom-nipean-bat was reigning at Angkor in 1340, and that in 1351 the Siamese king defeated the city, and placed his son on the throne. This prince and two others met with violent deaths, and the rightful king regained his throne in 1355. The Chronicle further relates that the next king in 1373 reconquered two provinces from the Siamese, taking 8,000 prisoners. The Siamese annals omit this, but record that in 1385 the Siamese took Angkor by storm, and after sacking it, and killing all the inhabitants who were useless for slaves, marched away with tremendous booty and thousands of prisoners, leaving only 5,000 souls alive within the walls. The Cambodian account does not quite tally—but the melancholy end is the same. It tells that in 1417 the Siamese besieged Angkor, which capitulated after seven months siege, during which its ministers had gone over to the enemy. They departed for Siam, taking a great following of the people. This is the last mention of Angkor as an occupied city.

These annals prove that whatever other characteristics the old Khmer kings may have failed to bequeath to their descendants, their migratory habits were duly passed on. In 1435 King Prah-bat-somdach-prah-barommo-reachea-thireach-remea-thuppdey departed with his court and his ladies, and built a palace near Bassan; the next year he built another at Chidor-muc (Phnom Penh); another king moved to Udong in 1505, and another to Lovek in 1528. A new palace was built at Udong in 1620; and from that time onward, the kings appear to have vacillated between Udong and Phnom Penh until the latest migration in 1866.

A seventeenth-century royal indiscretion is recorded as having taken place at Angkor Wat. In 1630 the reigning king, a young man in his twenties, made a pilgrimage to the temple with all his court, including his uncle, who was a high officer of state. On the way the young king's roving eye fell upon his uncle's beautiful chief wife, who returned his amorous glances with interest. The young people

was war between the two princes; but the faithless wife was a faithful mistress, and fled with her royal lover, only to be killed at his side by her husband's soldiers.

There is a dramatic account of a Siamese invasion in 1583, with 100,000 men, 800 elephants, and 15,000 horses; enlivened with such details as the abduction of the King's chief wife, and the flight of his elderly aunt. The Siamese account of the same affair describes the victorious Siamese king bathing his feet in the blood of the fallen ruler of Cambodia, before departing with 50,000 prisoners along the old raised causeway into Siam.

Besides these 'official' records, the royal library contains a collection of stories and legends dating back to the year 543 B.C., all related with meticulous care for detail and treated quite seriously as historical facts. The prince from Delhi who married the Naga's daughter is here represented as attaining a ripe old age of 500 or so: (though after all there is no reason to take exception to that if we accept the Book of Genesis—for he would have been a mere boy compared with Adam's 900 summers!). There is page after page of horrors, compared with which the most gruesome crimes of Edgar Wallace's villains would seem mere benevolences: as, for instance, a princess burned to death to ensure that the child she was carrying should never be born to usurp his father's throne; or another who was cut in ten pieces with the same object, though the baby survived, to be rescued by an eagle and adopted by a hermit—who was eventually murdered by the very child he had braved a thousand dangers to protect. Is it any wonder that this kingdom, whose history is as fantastic as the 'Arabian Nights'—whose only tangible reminders of the past are magical palaces deep hidden in mysterious forests —should have captured the jaded modern imagination? Or that it should set sober elderly students babbling childish tales of forgotten fairylands?

Seeking for some firmer foundation on which to drape these queer old myths, one is tempted to borrow from the more reliable annals of the Cambodians' neighbours the

them the lay-out of their royal cities, and their peculiar passion for abandoning them and building new ones. The Cambodian records are stubbornly dumb regarding the actual erection of cities and temples, or the capricious movements of their wandering kings; but the details in the Burmese annals of the building of Mandalay—on exactly the same plan as the Khmer cities—and the account of the king, migrating in state from the old capital to the new, dragging a whole population willy-nilly behind him, might well pass for a story of Angkor, and brings to life, as could nothing else, the scenes of bizarre splendour that must once have been enacted in the now silent forests of Cambodia.

When King Mindon Min decided in 1856 to found the new royal city of Mandalay, he first sent for his wise men to fix a day for the laying of the first stone, and five officers were appointed to supervise the construction. The plan was the traditional one: a perfect square, intersected by avenues meeting at the exact centre, where stood the palace—as the Bayon stands at Angkor. A wide moat was dug outside the city walls, separated from them by a strip of grassland; a large artificial lake (like the Baray) supplied the new city with water; and the western gate, used for funerals, was called the 'Gate of the Dead'. When the city was ready for the king to take possession, he went 'in splendid procession' with his court, followed a little later by the priests and religious bodies. These also marched in procession; first the priests, then some five hundred Buddhist priests, with images of the Buddha and the Buddhist scriptures carried on platforms, the Buddhas shaded by eight golden umbrellas, and the scriptures by six. The chief priests had four white umbrellas each, and each of the five hundred monks, two. They were received at the principal gate of the city by the King and all the court.[1]

Stories of earlier migrations are much the same; and we get a sidelight on what must have been the effect of these arbitrary removals on the luckless population, in an account of King Bo-daw-paya's abandonment of Ava for Amarpura in 1783. He moved to it with all due pomp; but some of the population, unwilling to abandon their

[1] *Mandalay*. V. C. S. O'Connor (Hutchinson, London).

homes, 'struck' and remained behind. Whereupon the king had the buildings destroyed and even the avenues of trees cut down, in the abandoned city. A description of it only thirteen years later gives a good idea of how soon a tropic city may be obliterated. . . .'The materials have been removed . . . tall thorns occupy most of the site of this lately flourishing city. It would be impossible to imagine a more striking picture of desolation.'[1]

[1] *Mandalay*, V. C. S. O'Connor (Hutchinson, London).

CHAPTER NINE

'WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE'

There is never the least risk of boredom or stagnation for the student of Angkor. Nevertheless, it really did seem, during the last few years, that a faint, but fairly definite outline of the Khmers' great architectural period had been drawn, and the chronological order established, in which the most notable buildings were erected, as the result of several decades of archæological research. There were disputes on many minor points, of course; but the main facts (for such they were confidently asserted to be) were stated with such assurance that they were accepted by the less informed with as little question as the dates of the kings of England. Those of us who were a trifle more than superficially interested in the subject, pored over mighty tomes compiled by the specialists, nodding our heads appreciatively over the apparently irrefutable logic which pointed out how the superlative perfection of Angkor Wat's plan was evolved little by little, by co-relating courts and galleries, and correcting mistakes, in the earlier buildings. We were told how the ingenuous 'naïveté' of the enormous Bayon, with its chaos of daring architectural experiments, exhibiting as it were the growing pains of an art struggling towards maturity, contained the basis of the plan from which the supreme harmony of the Great Wat's inner temple was to emerge; how the whole plan was first clearly forecast in the Ba Phoun; and how that unique experiment, the 'four-faced tower', was a piece of architectural exuberance which was obviously immature; a sort of glorified toy or stupendous doll—which the Khmer designers abandoned as unworthy when they left childish things behind them, and attained a riper perfection of style and dignity. All this and much more; and then, just as we were beginning to wonder whether our curiosity regarding Angkor might not soon be too well satisfied, and the veil stripped too completely from its mysteries by these con-

scientious researches—Monsieur Phillippe Stern, Assistant Conservator of the Musée Guimet, Paris, calmly hurled a bomb into the midst of them which (in the vulgar but only adequate phrase), blew all the accepted chronology sky-high!

The whole proof of the identification of Angkor Thom with the city built by Yacovarman in the ninth century (which had been accepted as a certainty almost ever since the study of the Angkor ruins began) rested on an inscription found at Sdok Kak Thom—some distance to the north of Angkor. This recorded that the capital was built around a 'central mountain' to which everything pointed as the Bayon, it being Brahman custom to give this name—symbolic of Mount Meru, the dwelling-place of the gods—to a temple marking the centre of their cities; and it was a natural inference that so huge a city as Angkor Thom could be no other than King Yacovarman's great capital.

But M. Stern refuted the long-accepted theory that the Bayon was this 'central mountain', or that it was built in the reign of King Yacovarman at all. He claimed that it was built a century and a half later, in the reign of King Udiyadityavarman, putting forward as proof an inscription found at Lovek.

This would have been bad enough. But the great Bayon did not stand alone; it represented a tremendous period of architectural construction in which were included all the other buildings adorned with four-faced towers. So that all this great company of the four-faced giants—Prah Kahn, Ta Prohm, Banteai Kdei, and the rest—even the very gateways of Angkor Thom itself—had perforce to follow their huge leader from the end of the ninth century into the eleventh or twelfth. Down came all the carefully built up history with a crash. The 'definitely established' facts were ignominiously dismissed, and others as supposedly infallible set up in their stead; and any possible danger that Angkorology might find itself on the shelf was safely over! Since then, the savants have vied with each other in the making of discoveries that upset all previous theories, and the history of the mysterious place has all to be written over again. As regards the chronology of the

AMONG THE GIANTS OF THE BAYON

A view of the lofty paved gallery that winds its way between the uncounted four-faced towers of the Bayon

architecture, M. Coédès, the present head of the École Française d'Extrème Orient, has advanced the théory that Phimeanakas, Ba Phoun, and even Angkor Wat itself were all only stages of development on the way to the final complications of the Bayon and Banteai Chhmar: a startling theory indeed: according to which the Bayon's faults of design and construction are to be regarded as a sign not of youth and immaturity in the art that created it, as was previously supposed, but of senile decay! M. Coédès sees this enormous temple as a hasty orgy of building, possibly induced by a necessity to house a plethora of statues representing persons who had been elevated to divine status after death, according to the custom of the times: a final effort of Khmer architecture in the time of the Buddhist king Jayavarman, who reigned during the latter part of the twelfth century, and whose prodigalities are recorded on the stele at Ta Prohm.

All sorts of other theories combined to depose the poor, battered old Bayon from its proud place as the 'Hemagiri', or Central Mountain, of Yacovarman's city. M. Finot, the previous head of the École Française, had uncovered in the very heart of the Bayon, with his colleague, M. Parmentier, a number of Buddhist figures and symbols, of obviously earlier date than the structures that hid them and had been built over them; and it began to seem most improbable that the temple could have been the one erected by Yacovarman in honour of Siva. It followed inevitably, that if the Bayon was not Yacovarman's Central Mountain, it was more than doubtful that Angkor was his city; though successive suggestions, identifying the Hemagiri with half the principal buildings in Angkor in turn, sought to prove that it was so.

Curiously enough, a point that had hitherto seemed an anomaly now gave colour to the new theory that the Bayon was the last, rather than one of the earliest, of the great temples. This was the fact pointed out by Commaille, the first Conservator of the ruins, that in all the wealth of carving at the Wat there was not a single representation of a four-faced tower; whereas at the Bayon there is one of a temple with towers like those of the Wat! As regards the date at which Angkor Thom, as we now know it, may have

been completed, it is M. Coédès' opinion that it was rebuilt in the end of the twelfth century, after having been destroyed by the Chams, who are recorded in an inscription as having sacked it in 1177.[1] MM. Stern, Parmentier, and Coédès all point out that the great number of re-employed stones in the buildings of the Bayon style—i.e. with four-faced towers—indicate that they were rebuilt with the materials from others. But as to when. . . . M. Stern sums up the difficulties of the problem when he says: 'the chronology of Angkor is a crossword puzzle of dates, which any fresh factor coming to light may upset.'

Now and then, amid all the problems that the archæologists have set themselves to solve, a smaller and more human one will crop up: as, for instance, when Aymonier was taking rubbings of the many short inscriptions in the Bayon, describing the dead persons who had been given godly status, he found one which had been carefully erased, letter by letter, with a chisel. What dramatic story may there not have lain behind that, to account for so laborious a dishonouring of the dead? Was someone's ghost perhaps brought to trial and found guilty, and so deemed unworthy of the divine company?

It was as a result of all these disruptive theories that the investigations around Phnom Bakheng [2] were undertaken; following which M. Trouvé came upon the remains of a beautiful little three-tiered temple, half-buried in the dyke enclosing the Western Baray. Inside it was a shaft leading down to a subterranean chamber: the sort of 'find' that seemed almost too good to be true in these matter-of-fact days. The temple proved to be known to the natives, who called it 'Ak Yom'; and though the shaft appeared modern ('modern', that is, in terms of Angkor, in which a century or two counts but little) and had probably been sunk by treasure-seekers, the vault to which it led, some 36 feet below the shrine, was of very ancient construction, and is presumed to date from sometime between the sixth and eighth centuries. It contained an inscription dedicating the temple to Gambhiresvara, or 'Siva of the Depth'.

The discovery aroused all the latent hopes that lurk in

the breasts of even such grave and reverend signors as the archæologists, for a treasure-hunt! And it occurred to someone to suggest reopening a pit in the central sanctuary of the Bayon, which had been covered up many years ago by M. Commaille, to prevent accidents. It was recalled that in 1920 a shaft had been sunk in one of the eastern galleries without result; but that did not deter M. Trouvé from setting off with a party of coolies to the grim, pitch-dark inner sanctuary: to be rewarded by finding that the opening led straight down into the depths of the huge mass of masonry. The coolies dug their way down by inches in the dank, stifling darkness of the confined space, until they were nearly 50 feet below the floor of the sanctuary where they had started. Here they were stopped by water; and when that had been pumped out, the shaft was found to be choked with big broken fragments of sculptured stone. When these had been raised and fitted together, they proved to be a Buddha, 12 feet high, seated on a Naga: of fine workmanship, despite its great size. Not quite the treasure that the treasure-seekers hoped for, of gold and precious stones, which native tradition still persistently asserts to have been hidden in the Bayon; but a treasure beyond price to those who held that the Bayon was originally a Buddhist temple; for what was more likely than that this great image of the Master was the one who first presided over its Holy of Holies, before the fanatics of another faith tore him from his pedestal, and cast him down into the awful darkness in the depths of his own temple?

The gods having thus smiled upon his enterprises, the Conservator next adventured into the inner sanctuary of Angkor Wat. But here the luck turned. Excavations beneath the floor to nearly the same depth as that reached in the Bayon, were made with great difficulty; but up to the autumn of 1934 no signs of a former shaft had been found: much less of a buried Buddha.

Another long-accepted chapter of Khmer history which is now being rewritten, is Aymonier's version of the story of Jayavarman, the king of Java, notable for his insatiable appetite for building new cities. The location of these is

a fruitful subject of controversy; and M. Coédès has recently 'placed' Indrapura near Sambor; Hariharalaya at Loley (now known, with its adjacent groups, as Rolous); Amarendrapura north of Battambang; and Mahendraparvata on the Kulen mountains:—Aymonier having previously located the three last-named respectively in the well-known groups of Prah Kahn (Angkor),[1] Banteai Chhmar, and Beng Mealea. Another, among many new theories, suggests that Ak Yom, the recently discovered temple mentioned above, 'may have belonged to one of the nomad king's capitals.

Even the graven statement that this king 'came from Java' gives rise to doubt as to what exactly may have been meant by the name 'Java'. In M. Finot's opinion, it could have applied equally well to the Malay Peninsula, which at that time (the eighth or ninth century) was part of the Sumatran kingdom of Criyijaya, to which the island of Java also belonged.

The famous inscription at Ta Prohm is a good example of how provocative of controversy even evidence so solid as that of a graven stone can be. This stele has long been assumed to have been engraved at least a century or two later than the erection of the temple in which it stands, for Ta Prohm was thought to be among the very early constructions. But now, M. Coédès suggests that its record of King Jayavarman's erection of '39 towers, 566 sections in stone, 288 in brick, two basins 76 fathoms wide and 1,150 fathoms long, and 2,702 fathoms of laterite wall' points to nothing so much as to Ta Prohm itself. The difficulty then arises that the inscription is dated 1186—only five years after the king's accession—rather a short time to accomplish so enormous a piece of work! To add to the enigma, the campaign against Champa which it records did not take place till some years after the date at which the stone purported to be engraved; so in desperation the historians have decided that it must have been antedated!

Another instance of the unstable clues over which it is scarcely surprising that experts should disagree, is the

[1] There is another huge group of ruins, also called 'Prah Kahn', near Kompong Soai, about 100 miles from Angkor. It was explored and described by Delaporte.

claim (each carefully recorded on stone) by three separate kings to have ordered the erection of Ba Phoun: or rather of a temple which is believed to be Ba Phoun! and one could go on multiplying such examples indefinitely. There are many arguments as to the destinations of some of the buildings; one writer, for instance (de Beylie) suggested that Angkor Wat was no temple, but a palace, and that the sanctuary was the king's bedroom—scarcely the boudoir that a fabulously wealthy monarch would choose, one would think! A Leipzig savant, M. Przyluski, in 1933 put forward the theory that the Wat was not a temple but a tomb, designed to shelter the ashes of King Paramavishnuloka; following a somewhat similar theory by Dr. Bosch, chief of the Archæological service of the Dutch East Indies. M. Coédès agrees, in so far as that the king's remains might have been placed in the central sanctuary under a statue (of which the pedestal still remains) representing the king in the character of Vishnu, to whose bosom he had departed, and whose name he had been given after death.

You cannot 'get away' with mistakes concerning Angkor, even when they are a generation old. The greatest of all authorities, Aymonier, was caught out recently in the one slip he had made among all the hundreds of inscriptions he found and recorded. This was one he described as on the door-pillar of a small chapel at Prc Rup, bearing the date 960 of our era. Recent investigations have failed to find it; but an inscription bearing this date having been discovered at Bat Chum, it is supposed that this was the one referred to: a matter of little importance, but illustrating how meticulous is the care used in the study of the ruins.

Even the high-flown language of Oriental poetry is sometimes pressed into service in support of various theories. A long inscription in verse, for instance, containing the words: '. . . One which touches the sky with its summit . . . the other which reaches down to the depths of the world of serpents,' is held to refer to the walls and moats of Angkor Thom—on the ground that it was customary in Sanskrit poems, to glorify cities by comparing their walls with mountains and their moats with the ocean:

So it goes on, year after year, each earnest seeker after truth working out his own particular solution to one or other aspect of the ever-fascinating riddle; each 'definitely establishing' facts which give the lie direct to others definitely established a few years before. And when you realize on what frail foundations and oblique poetic references the whole of Angkor's story, 'so far as it can be said to have one, is built up, it is not surprising. Especially if it is remembered that among all the arguments that are bandied to and fro, the archæologists themselves realize the fragility of the 'proofs' on which, for lack of better, their theories have to rest. As M. Coédès recently remarked: 'Even the genealogies of the kings must be taken with a grain of salt; for they were most likely built up piecemeal to justify the presence on the throne of some usurper':—and those very genealogies are some of the few 'definite' fragments of history that have come down to us!

Pity the poor ignorant layman who tries to keep pace with it all! But it does at least prove how fascinating a game is archæology, when such romantic giants as the Angkor ruins are the pawns on the board; as well as how easy it is to construct or destroy a plausible 'story' out of such materials. And all this argument 'about it and about' is really very delightful. It is an indication that learned professors are as vulnerable to the potent influence of the place as those who make it the goal of a sentimental journey, so that these last need feel no shame for the extravagance of their transports. What is more, it serves rather to enhance the mystery than to clarify it; for each fresh discovery only opens the door to new problems.

But the very best thing about it is that when all is said and done—it really doesn't matter in the least! The marvel and the beauty of these gray old cities and temples are just the same, whether the king that ordered their creation was called Yacovarman or Jayavarman or anything else (which are only meaningless names to us after all), or whether they were erected to the glory of Siva or the Buddha. Angkor Wat still remains the supreme achievement in the world's architecture, whether its builders worked up to it by way of the many-headed Bayon;

or, having built it, went mad as a reaction from their ecstasy on seeing the Wat's perfection, and created the Bayon's giants in an architectural frenzy worthy of its cause (an entirely new theory, by the way, which may commend itself to Angkorologists when the present supply runs short!)—or whether the power that set it up was, literally, the 'faith that removes mountains'.

The real essential riddle; which would be no nearer solution even if we should ever 'definitely establish', down to the day of the month and the week, the exact date of erection of every building in the Angkor region, is the one that every mountainous grey stone of them all, whispers tauntingly as we pass: 'Here we are! How did we get here?'—And all the controversies that rage among the learned only go to prove how little more we know, after all, than the poor simple native who shakes his head and says: 'They were built by the Gods!'

CHAPTER TEN

'OF NO OFFICIAL STATUS'

Tchou Ta-Kuan, the oft-quoted Chinese observer, on whose descriptions of Angkor are based all the little we know of life in that glamorous city, so much resembles his famous contemporary, Marco Polo, in his impersonal style and lack of humour, that one is tempted to guess that the two may have been acquainted, and that the Chinese traveller borrowed from the Venetian the idea of writing down his impressions. The hypothesis is not unreasonable; for Marco Polo left the court of Kublai Khan only two years before Tchou Ta-Kuan set out for Cambodia from that of Kublai's successor.

Tchou made only the most sparing of references to himself; but enough of him is known to contradict (most politely, of course!) those writers who persist in calling him a Chinese Ambassador. One such scribe has even embroidered the theme to the point of describing in detail the imposing retinue of elephants, camels, and whatnot, that attended this representative of a great nation on his overland journey by the Mandarin Road to Angkor; going on to relate how in the enjoyment of the special privileges of his ambassadorial position he could penetrate at will into the inner places of temples and palaces, during his residence of many years in the capital.

But alas! for the accuracy of this imaginative historian: Tchou Ta-Kuan was no ambassador. He travelled by sea and not by road; he spent just one year at Angkor; and expressed great disappointment at the impossibility of seeing the forbidden marvels of the Palace! The unchallengeable dossier in the Biographical Note accompanying his Memoirs, in the Imperial Catalogue of K'ien Long, records that he had no official status, but accompanied the ambassador sent to the Khmer court in 1295 by the Yuan Emperor, Tch'eng-tsing (successor to Kublai Khan, who died in 1294). They arrived in 1296 and left in 1297.

Tchou Ta-Kuan was of a good family from Yong-kia in the province of Tcho-kiang, and bore the title of Ts'ao-t'ing. On his return to China he submitted his book on Cambodia to the famous poet Wou K'ieou Yen, who wrote several poems in its praise.

As to the route by which Tchou came to Angkor, he leaves it in no doubt. His account of the sea-voyage is so detailed that even compass-directions are given. 'Sailing S.S.W.,' he writes, 'you come to the ports on the coast of Tonking . . . and then crossing the sea you come to the capital of Champa.'[1]

'Thence,' he continues, 'fifteen days' sailing in a good wind brings you to Tchen-p'ou.[2] Then S.W half W. until you enter by one of the mouths of the river . . . all the entrances are so much alike that sailors have difficulty in finding the right one. From the mouth you get in fifteen days with a fair wind to Tch'a-nan,[3] one of the Khmer seats of government. There you tranship to a smaller vessel, and if the current is favourable, you arrive in ten days, after crossing the Sweet Lake, to Kan-p'ang,[4] which is fifty li [5] from the city.'

'I left home in the second month of 1296,' the narrative goes on, '. . . all through the journey we had contrary winds, and we only reached our destination in the seventh month. We rejoined our ships in the following year. Naturally it was impossible to know all the affairs of the country in such a time, but it was possible to observe the chief points, which I have set down.'

Chinese types alter little, and so do their fashions in dress; the diarist himself tells us that sedan-chairs, mounted on long parallel bamboos, carried by two bearers, were the usual mode of transport about Angkor city. So it is easy to picture Tchou's appearance, dressed in a straight, close-fitting grey silk coat reaching to his heels, at the door of

[1] Probably near the present town of Hué.
[2] Probably about Cape St. Jacques.
[3] According to Aymonier, this may have been Kampong Chhang; and Pelliot suggests Phnom Penh; but both are uncertain.
[4] Probably the entrance to the Siem Réap River.
[5] A Chinese "li" is about one-third of a mile.

his lodging, somewhere in the now trackless forest, raising a slender yellow hand to hail a chair from the row at the side of the street. Half a dozen of them, no doubt, would race and jostle each other to reach him first and secure his fare, as do the rickshaw-coolies in Shanghai and Singapore to-day. He steps in and settles himself, notebook and writing-brush in hand (the Chinese used paper a thousand years before we ever heard of it in Europe), and cake of ink and flask of water beside him; the coolies pick up their poles, look inquiringly at their passenger, and set off at an easy jog-trot.

Most likely, knowing but a few words of Cambodian, he would have asked his host to direct the bearers to the house of some resident Chinese friend; and the two boon companions would set out to see the sights, their chairs side by side, Tchou observing everything, asking endless questions, and jotting down the replies, with an ever-gratifying bias in favour of all things Chinese!

He never mentions the ambassador, nor his mission. Nor can Tchou have attended any official functions, for he was not the man to omit a description of them if he had. His account of the king's daily audiences in front of the Palace, is obviously that of an ordinary spectator; and all he saw of the Palace was the Council-chamber: which he probably visited just as tourists in our own times visit the 'show-places' of London and Paris. Chinese history makes it clear that the fabulous wealth of the Khmers was a by-word in China for centuries: which would account for the visitor's disappointment at not seeing more of the royal treasures.

It seems probable that the ambassador with whom Tchou Ta-Kuan travelled, was sent to Cambodia as a gentle reminder that the matter of tribute due to the Chinese Emperor had not been attended to for the last couple of centuries; but the bearer of this unpalatable message does not appear to have been any the less hospitably received, for otherwise he would scarcely have spent a whole year in the capital. No doubt 'conversations' took place in the intervals of banquets and elephant-fights and the rest: but

to have been much the same as those achieved by similar missions in modern times. At all events the Chinese archives record no resumption of payments after the envoy's return, or of any reopening of relations between the two countries. Perhaps the Khmer ministers succeeded in proving (in the approved diplomatic jargon) that it would be just as disastrous for the creditor as for the debtor, if any transfer of treasure took place, with all its attendant risks of pushing Angkor off the gold, brass, or bronze standard, or whatever was in vogue at the time!

But if the ambassador's visit was wasted, his friend Tchou's certainly was not. While the Emperor's representative was sitting in fruitless conclave, this more fortunate gentleman of no official status was wandering here, there, and everywhere, gathering a rich and varied harvest of information. Everything great and small that came within range of that earnest Celestial eye, was conscientiously noted down; and it is our good fortune that its gaze, though unsmiling, was so observant.

The visitor does not once refer to the capital by name, but always as 'the city'. Paul Pelliot, from whose French translation of the Chinese[1] the present extracts are taken, is of opinion that, living within its walls as he was, Tchou might only have heard it spoken of as 'Nogor' or 'Nokor'—which are among the many Cambodian corruptions of the Sanskrit 'Nagara', meaning 'city' or 'capital'—much as the Londoner to-day speaks of 'town'. After the discovery of Angkor, and the beginning of research concerning it, it was easy to locate the 'city' of the Chinese document in the newly found ruins: which we know by a still further corrupted form of the same vague title—'Angkor.'

Tchou Ta-Kuan's *Memoir*, which is classified in orderly fashion under separate headings, begins by describing the city walls, the five great entrances, the moat and its causeways, guarded by 'fifty-four genii in stone on each side, gigantic and terrible', and many other features that are unmistakably recognizable; followed by an account of the temples and palaces and the glories of their decoration that might pass for a description of Aladdin's cave. The

writer then turns to more homely topics. Local fashions in dress interest him greatly. Both men and women, he says, wore long hair, and their only garment was usually a piece of stuff round the loins. Even the king's wives wore this simple costume; but as the Palace ladies were 'as white as jade' ('because', the diarist carefully explains, 'they never expose themselves to the sun'), and the prevailing mode 'left uncovered breasts as white as milk', he does not appear to have found it altogether unpleasing!

The king supplemented his costume with loads of jewels, wearing, among others, 'three pounds' weight of great pearls'; and 'carried a golden sword in his hand'.[1]

All was fish that came to the industrious diarist's net. He switches over from an account of the king appearing at his 'golden window', to describe the methods by which a mother, after her accouchement, is able to 'retain the appearance of a young girl'. This highly desirable result seems to have been as simple a matter, given the treatment prescribed, as keeping 'That Schoolgirl Complexion!' 'I could not believe it when I was told,' says Tchou; 'but I was able to inform myself at first hand when the daughter of the family with whom I lodge gave birth to a child.... Sure enough... next morning... she went off to the river to bathe, carrying her new-born baby... it was really extraordinary.'

He professes a very low opinion of the local ladies, whom he repeatedly compares most unfavourably with the women of his own race. But I am afraid there can be little doubt that the worthy Tchou was something of a Pharisee. He takes such a manifest delight in describing those very propensities that he pretends to deplore. In no part of his work does he go into more detail; and his constant introduction of what might be loosely termed 'sex-interest' suggests that he was anything but lacking in

[1] Doubtless the Prah Khan, or Sacred Sword, which the Khmers believed was given to their kings by the god Indra. It is not known whether it was the same one as that now kept with great reverence at the Palace at Phnom Penh, and taken twice a week from its scabbard by special priests, who never touch it with bare fingers lest it rust and bring harm to the kingdom. It is encrusted with legends, but its known history does not go back more

similar human weaknesses. His detailed account of the 'tchen-t'an', or ceremonial deflowering of young girls by the priests, is a characteristic example.

Of the public health he does not speak too highly, commenting especially on the prevalence of leprosy. 'In my humble opinion,' he remarks, 'it is too much bathing that gives it to them.' Of their remedies he says: ' those they sell in the markets are quite different to ours; I do not know them at all; also there are sorcerers who treat the people. It is most ridiculous!'

The searchlight is next turned on to the people's homes: and again the women come in for some severe censure—this time for their lack of housewifely accomplishments. 'Such weaving as they do is very rough,' says this critical visitor; 'they do not know how to sew, or even mend their own clothes; they have to hire Siamese women to do it for them.'

The climate afforded a plausible opportunity for this tireless Peeping Tom to pass judgment on certain local customs which proved also an entertainment very much to his taste. 'The heat is terrible,' he sighs. 'The water is always as hot as though it had been on the fire. Whole families share a bath into which all the members of both sexes go together; and the women go in parties to bathe in the river. They take off the piece of stuff they wear round their bodies when they go into the water—even noble ladies do this without the least shame—and anyone can see them from head to foot. There is not a day when this does not take place, and the Chinese residents often amuse themselves by going to look on.'

Tchou certainly had his lighter moments, but he was none the less a competent observer. He meticulously enumerates the products of the country; its animals, birds, reptiles and fish, and remarks upon the wealth of plants, flowers and fruits—'thousands of varieties of which I do not know the name.' There is a de Rougemont touch about some of his descriptions, as for instance, the 'crocodiles as big as ships—like dragons but that they have no horns'; but modern visitors will endorse his comment that

are pathetically tiny creatures in proportion to the enormous loads they are expected to drag; and as the native cares nothing at all for their welfare, the poor little wretches are almost always walking skeletons, with staring coats and stumbling gait, plodding wearily along till death brings them kindly release from slavery.

To this visitor from the chilly north, the fact of 'three or four harvests a year' (no doubt on irrigated land) was of much interest; and his observation of different varieties of rice proves him to have had some knowledge of agriculture. He remarks with contempt that 'these people use no animal manure, which they consider impure', and that 'they regard the methods employed by the Chinese to fertilize their land, as disgusting'. He admits, however, that the Khmers had some skill in the fermenting of liquor; and describes with mild approval the four kinds in use.

Angkor was evidently a paradise for Chinese immigrants. 'The Chinese sailors who come here,' writes their shrewd compatriot, 'often take advantage of the benefits to remain. They need buy no clothes; rice is easy to earn; women easy to find; houses easy to build; furniture easy to make; and business easy to manage. And what is more, the natives are simple, and address a Chinese person respectfully with the title 'Fo', generally used in speaking of the Buddha.'

We get a glimpse of the administration of this then populous country in Tchou Ta-Kuan's account of the 'more than ninety subordinate governments, each with its own functionaries. . . . Every village has its own temple, and there is always a policeman to keep order. On all the main roads there are rest-houses for travellers, like our Chinese mail-changes. But in the recent war with Siam, much of the country has been devastated'.

The Khmers were a great people, but some of their customs were not of the pleasantest. There is one gruesome item in this long tale of their doings whose truth one might doubt if it had not been endorsed by responsible witnesses in modern times. Tchou relates it quite calmly, and without comment of any sort. 'Just recently,' he writes,

THE ELEPHANT WALL

This wall stretches for more than a third of a mile along one side of the great central square or "Place" of Angkor Thom. On it is carved a life-size procession of hundreds of elephants, tigers and buffaloes. Above it is the terrace on which stood the Palace and other public buildings

Every year the King of Champa receives a tribute of a certain quantity, which is said to confer strength and immunity from injury. It is collected in this way: men are posted outside the walls of towns and villages to lie in wait for any persons who may be abroad at night.... They catch them by throwing a bag over their heads and tightening the string round the neck. They then cut out the gall from the right side of the victim with a small knife.[1] When enough has been gathered, it is sent to the king. They do not take the gall from any Chinese person, because once, when Chinese gall was mixed with the rest, they putrefied, and a fresh lot had to be collected. I hear that the payment of this tribute is to be discontinued; but the Official Receiver of Gall still has his residence near the North Gate of the city'. . . . (Alas! that so unique an attraction as this macabre department of the vanished Angkor Government Offices should be lost for ever to modern tourism!)

Best of all the pictures of Angkor that Tchou Ta-Kuan has left us, are those of the gorgeous displays that took place in the great square dominated by the Terrace of the Elephants. Here, in front of the Palace, whose gilded eaves and towers then soared high above the noble terrace wall, the Khmers at the end of 1296 (as doubtless, every year for centuries) celebrated for fifteen nights and days the coming of the New Year; and at the beginning of every month a spectacular feast was held, each one with its own special ceremonies.

'For the spectators of these great celebrations,' he writes, grand-stands for thousands of persons were erected, and scaffoldings from which magnificent fireworks were let off. They could be seen a hundred li away! There were crackers as big as swivel-guns, which shook the whole city. All the nobles and ministers carried tapers and torches and

[1] Bouillevaux mentions this horrible practice as being in vogue at the time of his visit to Cambodia in 1850. Aymonier also says that the custom was practised by many Eastern races, who believed that the liver was the seat of courage. The galls were placed in spirit, and the resultant beverage was exceedingly stimulating! It was customary to rub the extract on the heads of the royal fighting elephants. Marini, a seventeenth-century

burned costly spices, and the foreign ambassadors were present as the guests of the King.'

From time to time 'the King went forth in gorgeous array. The procession was led by horse-soldiers, followed by bands of musicians; then came hundreds of girls from the palace, carrying golden vessels and utensils of every kind; then carriages and chariots richly ornamented with gold, some drawn by elephants and some by horses; then came princes and nobles mounted on elephants in a procession stretching as far as the eye could see; and after them followed the concubines, in carriages, in palanquins, and on elephants, and over a hundred umbrellas decorated with gold. Then came the King. He stood erect on an elephant, holding the Sacred Sword in his hand. His elephant was caparisoned entirely with gold, and surrounded with men bearing white umbrellas with golden handles. Behind came many more elephants and cavalry' . . . 'At other times I saw the King go forth in a golden palanquin carried by four girls of the Palace' . . . 'Whoever sees the King on his progress must prostrate himself with his forehead in the dust. If one should fail to do this, retribution follows swiftly at the hands of the King's Master of Ceremonies.'

The book ends with the oft-quoted description of the King's twice-daily audience at the Golden Window, where: 'you see the curtains drawn aside by the slender fingers of two palace girls . . . and the King appears. The populace await his coming sitting on the ground in front of the Palace; and when they hear the sound of the conches in the distance announcing His Majesty's approach, they put their hands together and their foreheads to the ground, and so remain until the sound ceases, when they may raise their heads. Then at the King's good pleasure, they may approach and lay their plaints before him; for the disputes of the most humble people may be brought direct to the King, who is the sole administrator of the law. . . . When all is over the King turns away. The two girls let fall the curtains across the window; and when the sound of the conch-shells has died away into the distance, everyone rises and departs.'

Tchou Ta-Kuan let fall the curtain for the last time, blotting out the only picture ever painted of this radiant, incredibly romantic realm, where, as he said, 'they know at least what it means to be a King!' . . . and leaves us, tantalized, amid the grey emptiness of its ruins. . . .

Five separate editions of Tchou Ta Kuan's *Memoirs on the Customs of Cambodia* are known to historians, and three of them have been accessible to French translators. The original edition, engraved on copper-plate, is extremely rare, but the École Française D'Extrème Orient is fortunate in the possession of one. In the latter half of last century two reimpressions of the original were made; one of which was seen by M. Pelliot in Pekin. The other, a smaller edition, is well known to modern Chinese students. The work was first introduced to European readers by the famous French Sinologue Abel Rémusat, who came across it by chance in the course of his researches into Chinese history, and published a translation in 1819. Further editions were issued in 1829 and 1833; and the new translation issued in 1902 was undertaken by Paul Pelliot at the instigation of M. Finot, then Director of the École Française, in view of the great advance made in the study of Cambodia and its history since the discovery of the ruins at Angkor. The work is enriched by copious notes by the veteran historian Aymonier and many others.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ENTER . . . THE TOURISTS

The admirable river steamer service established by the French, and a snug bungalow discreetly tucked in among the trees scarcely a stone's throw from the moat of Angkor Wat, were the first steps towards making Angkor accessible to ordinary travellers.

In the beginning there were not many. The journey, it need scarcely be said, was luxury itself compared with the conditions that had to be faced by the earlier explorers, but it was still long and wearisome enough to deter all except those with of both money and enthusiasm. They went first by steamer up the Mékong to a point about forty miles above Phnom Penh, where the river enters the Great Lake, or Tonlé Sap. This they traversed almost from end to end, changing to a smaller boat to navigate the narrow stream to Siem Réap; and thence by bullock-cart or pony-cart to the bungalow.

The tourists came first in twos and threes: mostly Americans who had heard from friends in the 'American colony' in Paris, of the marvel lately discovered in French territory.

But it is an axiom that road-making must always precede the advance of armies; and the true tourist invasion of Cambodia only began with the completion of the great French road-scheme, by which the far corners of their vast new territory were made accessible at all seasons of the year.

It is odd how history repeats itself. A system of highways (of which more than 700 miles, all radiating from Angkor, can still be traced) all raised high above the flood-level of the rainy season, was the essential framework on which the Khmers built up the greatness of their kingdom. And now it was one of the most important concerns of the new rulers of the country to establish similar means of communication; for hitherto, even the capital, Phnom Penh, had been cut off for months together from the

outside world, except by river; and to reach Angkor, as has been shown, was still something of an adventure.

But when the straight, smooth ribbons of motor-roads began to stretch out on their high embankments farther and farther across the interminable ricefields and grass plains, pushing their way into the forests until they reached the very walls of Angkor itself; and when—again following the ancient example of the Khmers, who provided 'salas' or rest-houses (whose ruins are still to be seen along the old highways) for the accommodation of travellers—the French built pleasant bungalows at convenient points along the roads: then the scene was set for the Second Act, in the drama of the New Angkor.

The players in the First Act had all been pioneers: adventurers, explorers; gallant men who thought life itself not too high a price to pay for the hope of achievement and discovery. The players in the Second Act were quite otherwise. They were brought thus far afield not by high endeavour—but by curiosity; encouraged, naturally, by the French authorities, and exploited, inevitably, by the tourist organizations. The tidal wave of post-War prosperity, combined with the multiplication of motor-cars, and the inauguration of motor-omnibus services equal to any in Europe, brought tourists in hundreds—still for the most part Americans—to see this latest 'sight' for themselves.

Very few of them stayed for long. Printed 'itineraries' issued by the various tourist companies told them exactly how they could 'do' the ruins in one, two, or three days (none of these pamphlets that I have ever come across proposed that any longer period should be wasted!); and with the curious docility that seems to be characteristic of the genuine tourist, they 'did' them accordingly, generally in expensive touring-cars hired in Saigon, with a uniformed guide sitting beside the chauffeur.

It was quite easy; for the main road had been extended to Siem Réap and Angkor, joining two loops, the 'Grand Circuit' and 'Petit Circuit' which now linked up Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, and a number of the biggest neighbouring groups. And as an inevitable result, nine out of

ten of these conscientious sightseers assumed that the only ruins on the map were those that time and guide permitted them to see. The one-day 'schedule' was a truly remarkable achievement; and I have often wondered whether the ghosts of Mouhot or de Lagrée, or even of poor disgruntled Father Bouillevaux ever made an excursion from Paradise to join these parties on their breathless tours . . . or whether, so doing, they would feel that their sacrifices had been worth while, if it was only for such as these that they were made? . . . But even so: there is no reason why it should affect the pleasure of our party, as they set out after breakfast to do the Grand Circuit!

Starting with the Wat, they were shepherded on foot across the two causeways, through the temple as far as the steps leading up to the sanctuary, and then back to the waiting cars. Then to Angkor Thom, glancing at the lion-guarded steep sides of Phnom Bakheng, and at Baksei Chankrang, without stopping on the way, and perhaps slowing up a little as they passed under the frowning gateway and through the city wall, while the guide pointed out the four-faced towers (assigning the faces to Brahma, Siva, or Buddha, according to his wayward fancy). Half an hour was good measure and running over for the grim old Bayon; plenty of time to scramble, shrieking with laughter, up and down some of its rock-like stairs and galleries, and to snap off several rolls of Kodak film, leaving their yellow cases strewn here and there by way of visiting-cards. Then to the Ba Phoun, too far away at the end of its forbidding causeway to be attempted by bold explorers still perspiring from crossing that at the Wat; and so, on down the long length of the Elephant Terrace, past the Palace and the Leper King and Phimeanakas, with a good view of all the buildings on the opposite side of the square, considerately arranged so as to save the trouble of leaving the car at all. Out by the North Gate: and the city of Angkor Thom thus disposed of, on they went again, to stop at one entrance of Prah Kahn, walk straight through, and be picked up by the car on the farther side. Then on by the road another mile or so to Neak Pean

graphy!) in ten minutes at most; and thence (though they didn't know it) along the crest of the dyke that once enclosed the lake so much admired by Tchou Ta-Kuan; across the river and the boundary of the other great vanished lake, the Eastern Baray, to pass close beneath the temple on a knoll that was once an island in its centre. On past Pre Rup, without stopping; (why bother, when it is in full view from the road?) skirting two sides of the lovely Sra Srang, the lake that is still happily a lake, and not only a memory; and so home, following the outer wall of the Great Wat's moat, to the Bungalow for lunch.

In the late afternoon, after a well-earned rest, they would set off again on the 'Little Circuit', following the same road as that of the morning as far as the Palace at Angkor Thom, and then turning east to leave the city by the Gate of Victory. Then across the river, past Ta Keo (which I am told many of the weary sightseers would take for the other great pyramid, Pre Rup, that they had already seen in the morning: the two being not unlike to a casual glance); and so on, to 'do' Ta Prohm and Banteai Kdei in the same time and labour-saving way as Prah Kahn, before joining the Grand Circuit, and the homeward road again. Thus do those most admirable new roads allow the cream of Angkor's ancient glory to be skimmed in a day; with a 'bag' of names and descriptions, jotted down in the speeding car, enough to tax the memory and the pencil of even the most conscientious of globetrotters.

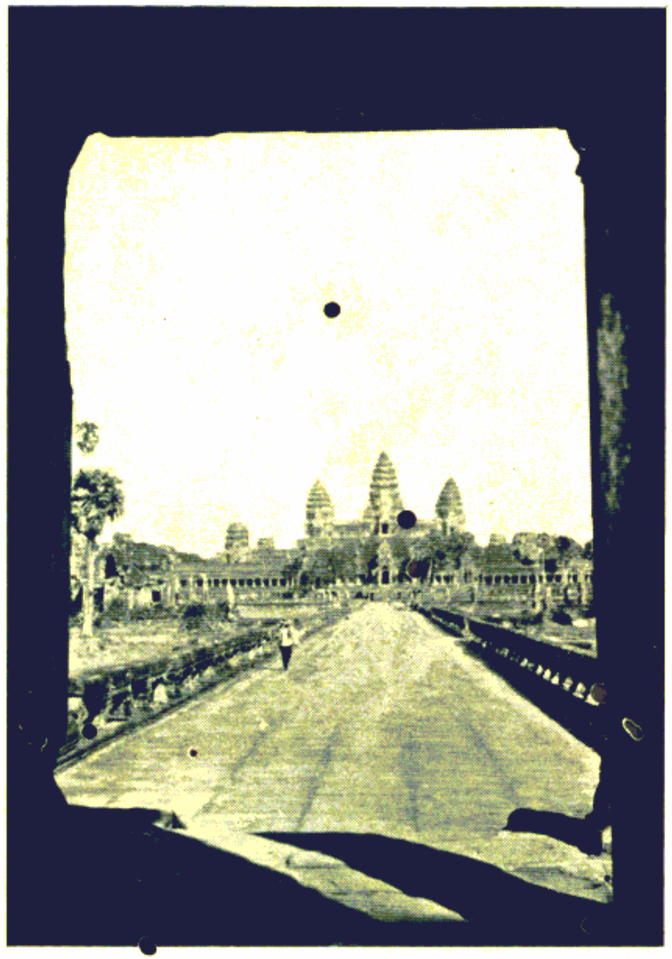
The two-, and three-day itineraries were merely amplifications of the first. The buildings passed in the one-day schedule with a wave of the hand, were now honoured with a personal inspection; more time was passed in the Wat; and elephants were hired to climb to the top of Phnom Bakheng. There were of course, too, always some who elected to travel more leisurely and cheaply by steamer and 'bus, and stay at the Bungalow independently; only to find their radius of action sadly restricted for lack of transport.

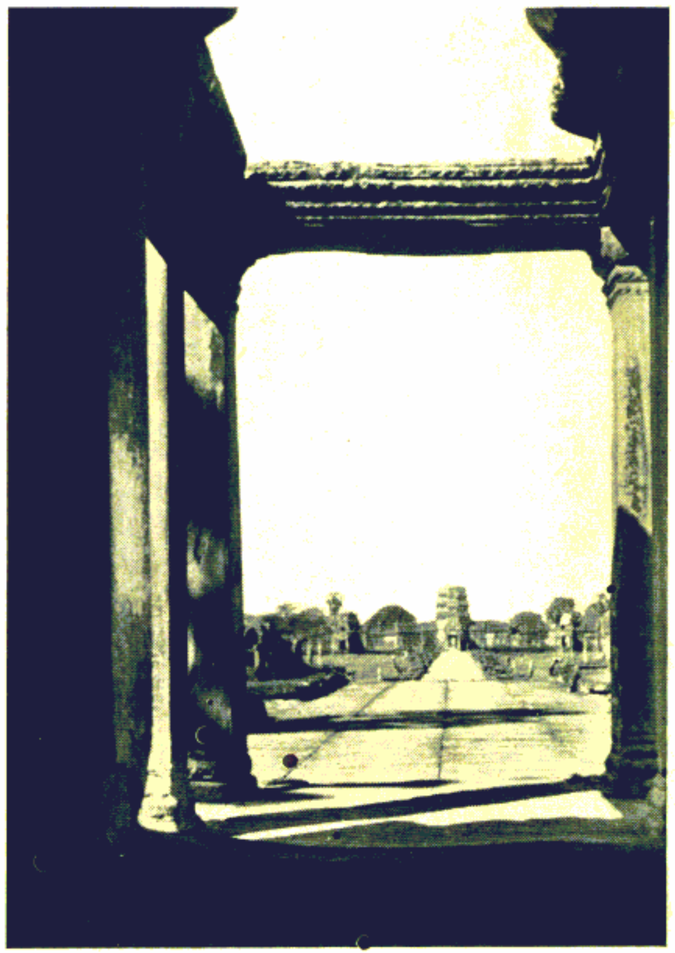
It is due to the good taste and discretion of the École Française and the Protectorate government that despite

remained entirely unvulgarized and unspoiled. Nothing is enclosed. There are no gates or turnstiles or flaunting signs (only the most unobtrusive of little name-boards), and neither offices nor guides—except the Saigon birds of passage aforesaid; none, in fact, of the horrors with which so many splendid antiquities elsewhere have been so shamelessly disfigured. There is actually nothing (beyond the one outstanding fact that he is able to reach and live at Angkor in comfort) to indicate to the modern visitor that the ruins are not just as the first explorers found them. And instead of an illusion-destroying 'charge for admittance', a tax called the 'Taxe Monumentale', of a small fixed amount per day, an admirably graded charge diminishing automatically with the length of your stay until it disappears altogether, is charged on the accounts of all visitors to the region: a charge that is easy to collect because the only places within more than a hundred miles, in which to live (unless you have your own camp) are the Angkor Bungalow and (quite recently) the two hotels in Siem Réap.

As time went on, the 'boom' passed, and 'depression' set in. And as globe-trotters were not among the products of civilization with which our financially disorganized world was glutted, the supply of them—which had begun to be a useful source of income, through the Taxe Monumentale, to the work of the École Française—soon fell off. So once more, nowadays, they come only in twos or threes; and for days or even weeks on end, a modern student or artist who may stray so far, can enjoy almost as perfect a solitude (with none of the hardships!) of the pioneers. But there are still enough of them, (bless their hearts!) even in these distressful times, to provide a little light distraction from archæologic or philosophic prowlings, if you care to take it.

Angkor may have been left alone with its dreams for a fortnight; and then one day a cloud of dust and a quite unnecessarily aggressive horn will announce the arrival of a party. Their beat is so stereotyped and the ruins so enormous that wherever they may overtake you, it is easy to avoid the intruders (as you will find yourself apt,





THE INNER CAUSEWAY

Looking eastward from the Outer Façade along the Inner Causeway at Angkor Wat, towards the main temple. The pillared gallery of the lowest tier is that containing the famous bas-reliefs

Looking along the same causeway from the opposite end, towards the point from which the left-hand picture was taken. A glimpse of the "Hattrei" or libraries is visible on each side of the causeway, about half-way along.

jealously, to consider them) if you so desire. And, perched at some point where experience has taught you that no guide ever leads his charges, you can sit undisturbed in as Pharisaic a mood as you please, and 'consider what strange creatures the Lord hath made'. In the Wat especially, there are places (I shall not tell you where!) deep in shade, and cooled by the westerly breeze that rises in the late afternoon; whence you can watch the party assembling in the distance, to march across the moat causeway with their guides; and then get a second view of them as they set out upon the inner causeway, stretching out endlessly before them, its uneven flags oven-hot under foot, and the sun's relentless heat reflected back in their perspiring faces from the enormous mass of masonry ahead. Almost always they wear sun-helmets, which add the last cruel touch of the grotesque to short, stout ladies, hobbling painfully on high-heeled shoes, and clutching dangling handbags as though they were some sort of talisman. Invariably one or two will stand helplessly at the top of the steps leading down on to the causeway, until their male escort gallantly offers them a hand. These brave fellows wear shorts (or if it is your lucky day, you may sometimes see one arrayed in all the majesty of the French version of plus fours—an even more ludicrous form of garbage, if possible, than the British one). Then there is pretty sure to be a couple of solid American business men, arrayed in crumpled Palm Beach suits, sun-spectacles, and large cigars, with Kodaks slung on straps across their shoulders; and there is never a party without at least one lovely young thing in the shortest of skimpy shorts, exposing to the vulgar gaze, legs that one would have thought any woman would have been only too thankful to hide: and discounting any practical utility that might be claimed for these revealing garments by wearing the latest thing in very high-heeled sandals. So that she needs every bit as much masculine support as her elderly mama—and gets a great deal more.

Sometimes, if you have not chosen your vantage-point quite carefully enough, the guide may wave an arm in your direction, and you will have an uneasy feeling that he may

be pointing you out as one of the natural curiosities of the neighbourhood. But that, after all, is a *quid pro quo*; in the circumstances you should be the last person to grudge them a little reciprocal entertainment—which some of them seem unable to find in the Wat itself. A noisy party of young men and girls—not American, for once, but French—invaded the great temple one day; and I watched them, unseen, from an upper gallery as they wandered, chattering, with open guide-book, among the maze of grace and beauty that makes up the lower Cruciform Court. One of the party was for exploring further; *but the rest had had enough.* '*Allez donc!*' an impatient voice remonstrated, 'Il n'y a rien a voir par là!' and down they all clattered again, bound for the next item on their morning's programme. 'Nothing to see . . .?' . . . Well, well! Not for the blind, perhaps. Modern youth had seen all that it had eyes to see; and, having seen, drifted off the stage and out of ken, insignificant as some fragment of a vague and aimless dream, leaving the Great Wat to its silence again.

The work of the École Française in preserving the ruins is eternally hampered for lack of funds. And therefore, as a source of income, all tourists are welcome guests in Cambodia. But sad to say they have not been altogether an unmixed blessing. Some of them have so far abused the privileges won for them by the explorers and by those who have made the ruins accessible, as to 'souvenir' pieces of sculpture; and there have been even worse cases of sheer vandalism in the mutilation of wall carvings. As the result of representations by the École Française, government decrees have been issued imposing penalties up to two years' imprisonment, and fines up to three thousand piastres, upon any person convicted of removing, defacing, or in any way damaging the carvings, or scribbling upon the stones of the buildings. Fewer cases of this kind of hooliganism have been reported in the last few years; though whether the severity of the threatened punishment has acted as a deterrent, or whether the improvement is the natural result of the stagnation in 'tourisme' since the depression, it is impossible to say. But it has seemed

to me that those responsible for the protection of the ruins, despite the adverse effect upon their finances, do not regard the present check to the tourist invasion with unmixed regret.

The Angkor Bungalow has passed through several hands and many managements since its erection in 1908, and the particular phase in which I first sampled its hospitality was not one of its happiest. Its extreme isolation and the 150 or so miles of limited road transport that was its only link with the sources of supply made its administration difficult . . . and looking back, vague memories come down the years of the thin *pot-au-feu* fortified with shapeless floating oddments of crust, with which we twice daily tried to stay the pangs of hunger; of a starving guest's appeal for a boiled egg—which burst with a loud report in her face on being tapped; of another who cracked a tooth on a banana which somehow, unaccountably, had developed seeds as hard as a nut; and of a bellicose British officer's demand, shouted across the dining-room in stentorian court-martial tones to a would-be lordly manager, for the 'BUERRE!' that a frightened table-boy had not dared to produce without permission from headquarters.

But it was a pleasant place nevertheless. Built in the shape of a capital 'E', with an extra wing or two added as occasion required, it was shaded with wide verandahs, and every bedroom was well furnished (especially in the matter of luxurious modern beds) and provided with its own bathroom. The Bungalow (there were several attempts to re-christen it, but as 'the Bungalow' it was, and is, always known) was an oasis of civilized comfort in that isolated place; and it is not surprising that its resources were strained to the uttermost during the 'boom' years, and the demands upon its accommodation often far greater than there was any chance of meeting: though at worst you could always be sure of a roof over your head, if not of a bed.

It was ironic that the rather belated expansion of amenities for visitors to Angkor, designed to meet 'boom' conditions, should have coincided instead with the beginning of the financial depression. All the more so that it seemed

as though those concerned were seeking to compensate for their procrastination with exaggeration: as though they thought that tourists who had been unable to find a bed at the Bungalow would be consoled by finding a hundred or so super-bedrooms to choose from at the new hotel. Possibly they might—though I doubt it. But the 'crise' kept them at home instead. And whereas a few years ago there were tourists galore with no accommodation, now there is accommodation and to spare with no tourists—or almost none—to occupy it.

In the last year or so two European hotels have been opened in Siem Réap—where formerly there were none but Chinese hostelries. One is a modest building, and might well (one would have thought) have met the case. The other is an immense and dazzling white concrete palace that would look more at home on the Cote d'Azur than in its present setting in the middle of the Cambodian plains. But far from resenting its presence, somewhat startling though it is, not even the most sentimental of antiquarians could reasonably feel anything but gratitude for the admirable taste that ordained its erection five miles or so from Angkor, instead (as might only too easily have happened in such soulfessly commercial times as ours) of piling up a dazzling, whitewashed anachronism at the Great Wat's very doors.

It should be confessed, further, that there is another very sound cause for fervent gratitude. Even antiquarians must eat and drink; and it would be hard to imagine a pleasanter place to do either, than the cool, lofty dining-room, or a more vivid contrast to the conditions endured by Angkor visitors of other days.

There is an appropriate touch of magic about the place too. The 'crise' may have emptied it, as it has the far-off cousins on the Riviera that it so closely resembles. But though your footsteps echo eerily in the long, spacious lounge that is so cool and welcoming as you enter from the blazing sunshine outside, there is nothing in the least depressing about it. And however empty and deserted the huge dining-room might appear, the mere fact of

always the same effect as rubbing the stone of a magic ring in a fairy-tale: delicious food and wine is immediately set before you.

During my last visit to Angkor, when I was living at the empty Bungalow (closed in favour of the new hotel) it was my custom at midday, when not too far afield, to enter my modest 'pousse', and be trotted off along the winding forest road to lunch at this latest addition to the architectural splendours of Cambodia. Quite apart from the material enjoyment of a meal that could not be bettered in Paris, it was a stimulating contrast with the long hours of undiluted communing with the ghosts of the past; and it offered in addition a variety of light entertainment: whether, as sometimes happened, I was the only guest in a room that could easily have seated a couple of hundred, or whether I shared it with the oddly ill-assorted specimens of humanity that appeared from time to time, and seemed somehow quite wrongly cast for the rôle of pilgrims to Angkor.

However, any tendency to swelled head that I might have been developing, was soon dispelled by a nasty blow to my national *amour-propre*. The table-boys (who were importations from Saigon, and therefore quite sophisticated and conversant with French) soon took the stranger from the Bungalow under their wings, and on the days when I had the room to myself, would often come to chat with me while I ate my meal. But I cannot flatter myself that it was the pleasure of my society, or even consideration for my possible loneliness, that brought them there; it was sheer opportunism—the desire to learn something that might enable them to earn more tips from the other, more affluent visitors that the gods sent them on other days. Menu in hand, a 'boy' would approach; and, pointing to one item after another, ask me translate them: not into *English*—but, if you please, into '*American*!' The 'American' lesson became an almost daily affair; and the final blow to my lacerated patriotic feelings was dealt in the request, on my last day, to write out a list 'in American', 'of the things foreigners would be most likely to ask for!' It was

existed—French and Americans. A painful reflection, but doubtless a salutary one.

The boys, moreover, were perfectly right. The 'tourisme' so recently started in Indo-China, and particularly that which concerns Angkor, could never have existed at all, much less had its one short 'boom', had it not been for those alert and ever enquiring travellers the Americans. Not counting the serious students of all nationalities, who are so few as to be negligible in terms of tourists; an artist or two; a few French families from Saigon or elsewhere, making the long run in their new car; a honeymoon couple now and then; or an occasional Englishman or German, the travelling representative of some big business firm or other, who may take the opportunity to travel overland between Saigon and Bangkok ('expenses' accounts being conveniently elastic) casting a patronizing eye on Angkor on the way—it was, and still is, the American 'round-the-world' tourist who keeps the ball rolling. So after all it is not surprising that 'English'—as English—should be unknown, or that it should languish under another label.

The unpalatable realization that, in the boys' eyes at least, any oddity that might be about was certainly not on the part of my fellow-pilgrims, did not deter me from getting anything I could out of them in the way of entertainment—even though I had no hope of sharing in their largesse. I particularly remember two elderly ladies, most expensively dressed, who one day were the only other occupants of the dining-room. Wealth was written all over them: so clearly that the whole staff of boys took care to be well within hail of their table, whence every now and then one would fly away kitchenwards on some errand or other, to return in the shortest possible time, like a bee to its hive. The good ladies possessed high-pitched voices of excellent carrying quality, and their conversation left me in no doubt (as, I rather fancy, was their intention) of the general outline of their expedition. Each had hired a private car with guide and 'sho-fur' in Saigon; and had arrived here to find herself sharing with one compatriot

Naturally the two lonely ladies had fallen on each other's necks in the immensities of the empty lounge; (were they not, after all, two bold explorers, meeting in the heart of the Cambodian forest?) and they were now collecting data in company. When I came in, the manager was being plied with questions, the answers to which were being carefully jotted down in two neatly bound little notebooks. And as: 'Now tell me—what *is* the capital of Cochin-China? It *is* Angkor, isn't it?' was a very fair sample of the queries I overheard, the travel-books that these ladies doubtless produced on their return to their own country should be valuable contributions to geography. 'A more homely touch was an announcement by one of them to the effect that 'My sho-fur took my shoes to be mended, and they only charged one py-aster—the only cheap thing in Angkor!' . . . just as some visitor to the now deserted city might have said it hundreds of years ago!

The hotel management, not to be outdone in courtesy to its most profitable guests, saw to it that the announcements and advertisements on its walls should be made intelligible to them by translation into what they doubtless believed to be the American language. A specimen that hung close to my table, read thus: 'If you are anxious of your health drink only X . . . Water. Slightly cooled. Chimically and Bacterogically pure!'

Unlikely though it sounds, there was just one archæological lesson to be learned from the new hotel. It is built on the rough waste land just outside the town, and at the time of my last visit, a large area of ground behind it was being cleared and levelled. The object, I was told, was to provide 'le golf' as an attraction for visitors (whether with memories of Prah Pithu, believed by some to have been the 'Sports Club' of Angkor, I cannot say). But at all events it served as a demonstration of how the immense sites of the great Khmer buildings must have been prepared. When work was started on the potential golf-course it was all trees and scrubby growth, scored with deep ditches, a stream or two, and unevennesses of every kind. Less than three weeks later the streams had been

and as level as a billiard-table, with every vestige of debris cleared away. All that remained, in fact, was to build another Bayon upon it!

It may be that for the moment the 'Grand Hotel' is something of a white (a very white!) elephant. But the 'crise' will pass in time as all things must—are not the pages of history strewn with alternate periods of crisis and prosperity?—and the tourists will come again to Angkor in greater force than ever. But I like to think that however overwhelming their forces in the future, the French will be able to hold them under the same skilful restraint as they have in the past; and that what remains of the glory of Angkor will not be despoiled again by the devastating effects of this latter-day friendly invasion.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TWENTIETH CENTURY CAMBODIA

Cambodia to-day is a paradox—as it may well have been also to the historians of a couple of thousand years ago. For then, as now, a foreign civilization imposed itself upon long-established local custom, and doubtless bred untold confusion before the two combined to produce the creators of Angkor.

How many centuries may have gone to their evolution, we are never likely to know; but Rome was not built in a day, and neither was Angkor the Great. The wheels of Time carried the Khmers to the apex of their power—and then to their fall; and so, on and on, until their splendid realm became the helpless prey of their ever-fighting neighbours, torn to and fro like a fox among a pack of hounds.

And then Fate brought the French to take a hand in the country's destiny: to find a weak, impoverished kingdom that, for all we know, may not have differed much from the community found by the Indian colonizers long ago. The French have only had a few decades as yet in-which to make their influence felt; but already civilization is triumphing over barbarism; the long-slumbering arts of the people are being fanned back to life; and who knows but that a few centuries ahead, another Angkor may not arise . . . to fall again . . . and rise again . . . and so *ad infinitum*?

The presence of the French in Indo-China is a long story: dating back logically, if not directly, to the expulsion of the Christian missionaries from Japan in the seventeenth century; since it was after that blow to their hopes that the Catholic countries of Europe sought fresh fields in China and Indo-China, and that through them some slight knowledge of these countries reached the Western world. It was the persecution of their missionaries that caused France and Spain to send a military expedition against

Annam in 1858, which ended in the occupation of Saigon. This was followed by a request to France from the King of Cambodia for protection against his neighbours, Siam and Annam, who were fighting over his territory like dogs over a bone; but it was not until the French had established Cochin-China as their colony that the Cambodian Protectorate became effective by a treaty with King Norodom in 1863. Things did not work too smoothly for a time between protectors and protected; but eventually the difficulties were adjusted, and a further treaty in 1884 gave France wider powers to institute reforms.

In 1907 France concluded a treaty with Siam, by which Cambodia's ancient provinces of Battambang, Sisophon, and Siem Réap (in which stand the Angkor ruins) were restored to their rightful owner after centuries of Siamese domination. In the meantime protectorates had also been established by France over Annam, Tonking, and Laos; and a Chinese province, Kuang-Tchou-Wan, was leased in 1900 in connection with railway rights. All these (with the exception of the leased province, added later) were placed under a Governor-General in 1887.

The King of Cambodia is that *rara avis*, an absolute monarch and presides over a council of five chief ministers and fourteen members. His country is divided into fourteen provinces, each with its local governor, council, and subordinate functionaries innumerable. His present Majesty, King Monivong, is a versatile person, capable of playing his ancestral rôle of Oriental potentate on ceremonial State occasions—such as the gorgeous pageant of his coronation in 1927; and equally able, when it is expedient, to play the polished European gentleman—or even of neatly combining the two, as when he indulges a taste for Bond Street cigarettes in the intervals of a Royal cremation! He is something of a poet, and set to verse the classical dances performed in honour of an official French visit in 1931: a work which was ornately printed in Cambodian characters on a modern press installed by the French! His private museum is an extraordinary medley of East and West: of priceless treasures and worthless trash. It contains images of unknown antiquity, relics of

old Brahman days; bibelots of gold and enamel bearing the initial 'N' in diamonds, gifts from the Emperor Napoleon III to King Norodom; jewelry worth a king's ransom; a black 'bowler' hat trimmed with a magnificent diamond aigrette; a life-size Buddha of pure gold, studded with diamonds, weighty enough to disturb the gold parity of Europe; gold models of temples; and so on through an endless variety, down to a series of crude enlarged photographs of departed kings and notabilities, in the style usually seen in English cottage parlours.

Phnom Penh, the present capital, is an equally odd mixture of East and West, old and new. The street traffic is a mêlée of rickety native-built gharris (locally known as '*boîtes-à-alumettes*'), glittering motor-cars, rickshaws, top-heavy omnibuses drawn by tiny ponies that look like the mice in Cinderella's coach, and bullock-carts exactly like those illustrated on the walls at Angkor: all moving against a background of modern concrete buildings and vistas of public gardens with velvet lawns and brilliant flower-beds; of boulevards and avenues, and suburbs full of typically French villas.

In the centre of the town is the 'phnom' or hill that gave it its name: crowned by a temple, and beautified by the lawns and gardens that clothe its sides and surround its base, where alluring seats under shady trees tempt you to sit and watch this curious world go by. But first it is pretty certain that a big sandstone stele halfway up the slope will catch your eye, and you will hurry to it, expecting some historic example of delicate ancient script. It is rather a shock to find it inscribed instead in French: and announcing (with a grandiloquence quite in keeping with the Khmer style) that 'By grace of the Protection of the French Republic, by the Treaty of 1907. . . . Siam ceded to Cambodia the provinces of Battambang, Siem Réap, and Sisophon . . . and the Kingdom of Cambodia thus regained her National Heritage.' But the inscription pales into insignificance compared with the group of statuary beside it, commemorating the same happy event. It

soldier waves the tricolour over him on one side, and three beautiful dancing-girls proffer gifts on the other. This striking tableau, in the brightest of colours, is the work of a French artist named Rivière.

The street-markets of Phnom Penh are peculiarly its own, and yet have much in common with those of France; for here too it is the women, whether native or Chinese, who are the principal vendors. But in Phnom Penh the goods are set neatly out on the pavements, instead of on raised stalls. Shoes and sandals are a local speciality and extremely cheap; flowering plants, in home-made basket pots, standing in ranks of scarlet and orange, white and mauve, pink and green, with many of our most familiar European blooms—roses, chrysanthemum, dahlias and azaleas—among them, light up the whole street with glorious splashes of colour, and never seem to wilt or feel the heat, though they stand there all day. The whole market is transferred from one pavement to the other, into the shade, as the sun moves across the heavens, and all the goods are laid out patiently and methodically over again. 'Cafés,' where all manner of queer refreshments are served, are a great feature of these mobile business centres; and towards evening, when the heat of the day is over, fresh ones crop up here and there on both sides of the street, to meet the demand from the thirsty patrons who drift along to sit at their ease (on their heels) to discuss the affairs of the day.

Phnom Penh has, literally, a large floating population, which lives in covered boats moored at the riverside, cultivating tiny patches of garden on the rich soil of the sloping bank, deposited every year by the flood: gardens upon which, with the coming of the rainy season, they will look down from their flood-time moorings, through twenty-five feet or so of water!

The Cambodian capital is more important than the uninitiated might suppose; for it is a rich pepper-market—and the modest little pepper-corn is a grain that has made history. If its seductions as a condiment had never been

CAMBODIA

Showing the Great Lake, Tonle Sap, and some of the many branches of the River Mékong.

might never have been formed; we might never have had India or Malaya, nor the Dutch the East Indies. And it is not an unreasonable surmise that it was the fact that the Cambodian forests were full of the wild pepper-vine, that attracted the greedy attention of the long-ago Indian colonists. Whether or no, the export of pepper is very sure to have been one of the sources of the Khmer wealth, as it is to-day to the Chinese who have settled in Phnom Penh to exploit it. There are whole villages of native pepper-growers in Cambodia, which exports about three thousand tons a year, this crop being second only to rice on the list of its products.

Rice is, of course, the product *par excellence* of Cambodia as of the rest of Indo-China; and in the production of this immemorial crop the French are ably co-operating. By means of an extensive irrigation system, large areas of formerly useless land have been planted, until the annual crop of the territory under French control has reached seven million tons, two million of which are exported. In Cambodia the area under rice rose by 62 per cent in five years, to about 1,750,000 acres; the total area in French Indo-China being estimated at about five million acres.[1]

The natives always under-state both area and crop, for fear of higher taxation; so that all official statistics are calculated at about 30 per cent more than native figures! About 75,000 acres of new rice-fields are being watered by irrigation every year; and scientists are experimenting with two thousand or so varieties of rice in order to find the most profitable. They are trying also to persuade the natives to use fertilizers—an idea still almost as foreign to them as when Tchou Ta-Kuan made his acid comments seven centuries ago.

Maize is third on the list of Cambodian products; and the natives also grow sugar: but it is not crushed as it is elsewhere in Indo-China—except by their own strong teeth! Chewing sugar-cane is as popular in Cambodia as chewing-gum is in America; children offer traysful of short sections of it in the streets of every village, and the pecularly un-

pleasing sounds associated with its suction and mastication are part of the everyday music of Cambodian life. Nor is sugar here made into rum. It is two varieties of palm, the *Areng* and the *Rondier*, that supply sugar for fermentation into the 'sra-thnot' or palm-wine, beloved of the native; and at any time between November and April, you will meet the 'sugar-man' with his bamboo shoulder-yoke, from each end of which dangles a bunch of bamboo-sections containing the juice. A native expounded the method to me thus: the gatherer climbs a palm and attaches a sort of rough forceps to the fronds he wishes to tap; and after three days, during which the fronds are periodically 'massaged' to bring down the sap, the juice can be tapped for several days in succession. It is in great demand as a drink, just as it comes from the palm, as well as boiled down for sugar or fermented. It is quite usual to see a bonze (whose vows forbid him to drink alcohol) stop a sugar-collector as he comes from a tree, produce a bamboo cup from beneath his robes, and fill it from one of those into which the juice has been tapped; and then, squatting on his heels, quaff the sweet draught as though it were nectar. A 'census' of Cambodian sugar-palms showed them to number roughly 150,000.

No one in Indo-China seems to know when tobacco was introduced. It may have been the Spanish or Portuguese missionaries who brought the seed with them, and found its propagation easier than that of Christianity. Or it may even date from that discovery of America which the Chinese claim to have made in the sixth century. But whatever its origin, no Cambodian or any other Indo-Chinese native could do without it; and the small, square, bright-green patches dotted here and there among the harvested rice-fields are a characteristic of the landscape in the dry season. Each has its well, from which the water is raised by a long bamboo lever with a board hung from one end, on which a man stands to lift with his weight the bucket at the other. These tiny tobacco-patches make up a total of some 7,000 acres for Cambodia, most of whose produce is kept for home consumption, and for sale to the growers'

Cotton is indigenous to Cambodia; and tradition says that it was from here that it was first taken to India. It must have been cultivated from very early times, as weaving is an ancient art among the Cambodian people. The native cotton is of the same type (*Gossipium hirsutum*) as the famous 'American Upland', but as cultivated by the Cambodians, who sow the seed immediately after the retreat of the annual floods in November, the product is of poor quality with a very short staple. 'Dry' cultivation was tried under French supervision with some success; but as the soil had to be left fallow for two years between each crop, it was not profitable.

All travellers notice the numbers of water-buffalo to be seen once Cambodian territory is entered. But these animals are not the indicators of wealth that they are in Java, or it would be a strange contradiction to see so many among so poor a population. In Java, where almost every square yard of land is intensively cultivated, grazing-land is so scarce that grass is cut for fodder from every bank and roadside. Consequently the rearing of all draught-animals is costly and makes them valuable property. But in Cambodia, grass-land abounds, to say nothing of the rice-stubble after harvest: for here (again unlike Java) there is only one crop of rice a year, so cattle and ponies are freely bred. Their value is correspondingly small. Thirty piastres is a fair price for a buffalo; fifteen or twenty for ordinary cattle; and one of their diminutive ponies may be bought for ten or twelve. A great many of all these are sent down to Cochin China, where more land is under cultivation in proportion to the area, and less is available for grazing.

The mulberry is a native of Cambodia, and both sericulture and silk-weaving appear to be ancient industries. It has been suggested that Cambodia may have been 'the country called Serinda, where there were many Indians'[1]; and that it was from here that came the daring smugglers who brought silk-moths' eggs 'out of Ceres concealed in a

hollow cane'[1] in the sixth century A.D.; to make Rome (then suffering from an adverse trade balance due to her huge imports of the silk that was indispensable to her luxurious people) once for all independent of the East. Tchou Ta-Kuan asserted that 'the Cambodians do not breed silkworms'; but it is likely that for once this astute observer was at fault, and that sericulture was going on in other parts of the Khmer territory, if not in Angkor itself, at the time of his visit. It would be quite easy, for instance, for a foreign visitor to spend a year in France without seeing a silk-farm! Especially if he did not know the language and was dependent upon his own compatriots for all his information. Nowadays the silk industry is making great strides under the Protectorate; and the French believe that with their technique and the native skill which is the heritage of centuries, Cambodian silks will soon equal those of China and Japan.

The story of 'rubber' in Cambodia and throughout Indo-China is much the same as in the British and Dutch colonies. Successive 'booms' led to excessive planting, and the 'slump' when it came was disastrous. The industry here, as elsewhere, is now slowly recovering, costs of production having been reduced to meet low prices. When planting stopped, land concessions in all the States had reached four million acres, but only about 200,000 had been planted. Much of this area is now interplanted with pepper, coffee, and other crops.

Tea and coffee are grown in sufficient quantity to supply local needs and allow a surplus for export. The sweet-potato, arrowroot, and cassava (tapioca) are all favourite native crops, as also the soya bean, said to be as good here as in Manchuria. The ubiquitous coconut-palm is planted commercially; jute and other fibre-plants are grown in great quantity; and the kapok-tree is so familiar an object as to make one question Java's claim to world-supremacy in its product.

But all these cultivated areas are a mere drop in the ocean of forest that dominates the Cambodian landscape.

[1] Theophanes, in Muller's "Fragmenta Hist. Graec.," *Europe and China* (Edward Arnold, London).

It varies in density, but most of the jungle that has proved so effective a hiding-place for the ruins scattered throughout the kingdom is rich and heavy, the home of giant trees and dense undergrowth, a fit setting for the giants of stone that sleep among them. Their different varieties of valuable timbers are believed by forestry experts to run into thousands, but their commercial exploitation is as yet in its infancy. There is a native paper-industry, in which the bark of the mulberry-tree is used.

Cambodia has only one mine: an appropriate one for a country with such a romantic history, for it produces sapphires and rubies. The neighbouring States, however, produce zinc, tin, antimony, iron and lead; and the 'coal-cliffs' of Tonking are world-famous.

Of all the changes brought about by the French, the greatest is in communication and transport. Before their advent, the only 'main line' through the vast Indo-Chinese peninsula was the Mékong River. Each State, and even every village, was self-contained, and cut off from its neighbours by miles of flood in the wet season, and at all times by impenetrable forests, full of unknown terrors. The only tracks were deep in soft sand, on which two miles an hour was a fair pace. The transformation began shortly before the War, when a programme of 'Routes Coloniales' was drawn up, providing for about 6,500 miles of motor-roads, which were completed in 1923. The principal one is the 'Mandarin Road' which runs from the 'gate of China' (near Lang Son) to the Siamese frontier—over a thousand miles—passing through Hanoi, Hué, Saigon, and Phnom Penh. This magnificent road is 20 feet wide, and for much of its length is raised on a stone embankment well above flood level. Along it there travels, from village to village and from one capital to another, a constant stream of native passengers on the motor-'buses, putting an end to the old isolation and ignorant antagonisms.

The Cambodian language is peculiar in that instead of counting up to the almost universal 'ten', the numbers go only as far as 'five'. Thus—1 = moi; 2 = pel; 3 = bai; 4 = boean; 5 = pram. After that, 6 = pram-moi (five

and one); 7 = pram-pel (five and two); 8 = pram-bai; 9 = pram-boean; 10 = dap; then dap-moi, dap-pel, and so on. The system was thus explained to me by an old native, by signs and counting on our fingers, as we sat on a fallen tree in the forest, and I found afterwards that his lesson had been quite correct. There are names for all the multiples of ten, but these are borrowed from the Siamese, and are not true Cambodian. The script is of Indian origin, and is called 'aksar'.

The law of land-tenure in Cambodia is the same as that in Malaya and Java, whereby anyone who brings hitherto undeveloped land into cultivation, becomes its owner (for so long as he or his heirs continue to cultivate it) transforming it, in the expressive Malay phrase, from 'dead' to 'live' land. The virgin soil and the forests are Royal property. The French have instituted a system of concessions for European plantations.

The uneven density of population is the cause of a difficulty curiously reminiscent of the country's earlier history, when the conquerors in the ever-recurrent wars would march whole populations of the vanquished away to labour as slaves in some undeveloped region. Nowadays the problem arises of finding labour to work the plantations and mines in distant 'empty spaces'; coolies are recruited voluntarily, and quite large bodies of them migrate from better populated regions; but despite government efforts, abuses have crept in, and it has even been whispered that the treatment of coolies on some plantations differed little from that of the slaves of other days. There is, however, the difference that the coolies can, and do, escape, often sick and penniless, back to the regions whence they came; and it is not surprising that the result is to make recruiting difficult, even for more humanely run estates. In addition, certain anti-French elements have joined in a campaign against recruiting. It may be that part of the trouble arises from many employers' ignorance of native languages and customs, and that better understanding on their part will lead to a solution: a purely human problem, this, not to be cured by any legislation. Though it was recently made obligatory for European

officials to learn at least one native language within two years: a ruling which might possibly influence non-government colonists to do the same.

The public health has been a matter of deep concern to the French Protectors. Wherever their influence has penetrated, medical services have followed; and there are now over nine hundred medical institutions throughout Indo-China. Inoculation and vaccination is widespread, and quinine is given free to natives too poor to buy it. Whole armies of native midwives have been trained, and go to the most remote places to teach the principles of simple hygiene, and fight the dangerous primitive practices that have been handed down from ancient times.

Unfortunately, despite the genuinely beneficent achievements of the French, and their government system, in which the native is well represented—having 23 seats out of 51 in the 'Grand Council'—the serpent of communism has crept into Indo-China as elsewhere; and a convert (happily not a Cambodian) attending a recent Moscow conference, expressed the pious hope of 'rescuing Indo-China from the parasitic bourgeoisie'—of whose generous education system he was the ungrateful product!

Cambodia has no seaport worthy of the name on her own soil, and it is Saigon (thanks to the Mékong River) that is in actual fact the 'gate of Cambodia', through which passes the ever-increasing bulk of her import and export trade. It is to Saigon, too, that the traveller must go to learn something more of the wealth of bird-life that has always been the admiration of all visitors to these regions: from Tchou Ta-Kuan in the thirteenth century; and Dampier who remarked upon them—the numbers of wild peacocks especially—in his 'Voyages' in 1697; down to the modern naturalists Délacour and Jabouille, who recently devoted a work in four large volumes to a description of some of the inhabitants of this extraordinary bird-paradise.

There is a fine collection of the Peninsula's birds in the delightful combined Botanical and Zoological Gardens at Saigon: and especially of the water-birds in which Cambodia is so peculiarly rich. They are housed in a great

as art can make it, surrounded by a cool, grotto-like walk from which to observe them. Here black and white heron, ibis, and egret of all kinds come delicately stepping down to drink, exactly as you see them around the 'barays' of Cambodia; and here too the less often seen splendid 'Jabiru' has bred so freely that the whole place is illuminated by the almost impossible brilliance of his plumage. This giant of the heron family stands 4 ft. 6 in. high, and his neck and wings and 10 in. beak gleam with the same iridescent blue as that of some tropic butterflies. His long slim legs are flaming scarlet, and his body pure white: a truly gorgeous bird, whose demeanour suggests that he is fully conscious of the fact!

All the many varieties of pheasants and countless other birds of which every visitor to Cambodia is sure to have caught tantalizing glimpses, can be found and identified among the winding glades of this most pleasant 'Zoo'; though I am afraid it must be admitted that there is an odd inconsistency about the housing of some of its wild creatures. Sometimes a magnificent peacock sulks (and who shall blame him?) in a cage scarcely twice his length, with no hope of properly displaying his tail; while a couple of porcupines rattle their quills and preen themselves in what is relatively a palace, near by. But there were certainly never crocodiles in captivity in quite such home-like surroundings: a dim, damp, jungly corner, where they spend all their time in sleeping so peacefully that the notice 'Chọc phá thú vât Bi Phat' ('Don't excite the animals or you will be fined!') seems superfluous. I was sitting there one Sunday morning while the attendant swept the leaves from round one of them, and even off its back, as though it were as harmless a fixture as the seat on which I sat: confiding to me while he did so that this one was 'pas méchant', but that other (pointing with his broom to a monster lying admirably camouflaged among the twisted roots of a tree) was a thoroughly nasty fellow, and by no means to be trifled with; so that evidently even crocodiles are creatures of temperament. Morbid curiosity drew me back later, to do my best, despite the warning notice, to

with a 10-foot bamboo—from the safe side of the fence—roused him to the least sign of resentment. He only rolled up the blind that served him for an eyelid, and let it fall again; and I thought I caught the flicker of a cynical smile in the curl of his ugly snout. But I am bound to say that he gave me a very nasty fright: I glanced away from him for a moment . . . and when I looked round again, he had vanished without a sound! My heart missed a beat. The fence looked most inadequate; and if he could perform that sort of conjuring-trick, he might be under my seat, or getting ready to attack from the rear. I sat petrified—until I saw bubbles rising on the pond, and what looked like a lump of rotten bark coming to the surface: whereupon I swore by all the Jungle Gods that I would break the rules no more!

Such are just a few of the thousand-and-one aspects in which the new Cambodia and its neighbour States reveal themselves after only two generations of French influence: the pity is that we may not watch them for another twenty! The French-Cambodian combination is scarcely likely to aspire to such architectural achievements as those of the Khmers; but there is no doubt that it is building a new civilization. And it may be, for all we know, that it will write in the future, chapters as eventful as any in the country's strangely romantic history.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

It seems to be an accepted axiom, when a Western Power sets out to confer the blessings of Christian civilization upon any part of the earth that it has appropriated, that one of the foremost of those blessings must be education.

The French in Indo-China have been no exception to the rule. Ever since they established their colony and protectorates, their efforts to enlighten the native peoples under their charge have been unceasing; but they have been complicated by many problems, owing to the numbers of different vernaculars spoken and the consequent difficulty of finding a common medium of instruction; and the strong opposition of the natives, who for a long time regarded 'school' as some kind of forced labour.

The first fence to be got over was the lack of interpreters. The French (with the exception of a few missionaries) knew no native languages, and the natives, naturally, knew no French. An appeal to native cupidity, by means of bribes camouflaged as scholarships, succeeded in inducing a few to study elementary French. But for a long time pupils were so hard to get that they had to be almost forcibly recruited; until by degrees, as the unknown terrors of school were found to be not so bad after all, the opposition died down, and native teachers were trained. It is true that the resultant brand of the melodious language of France spoken by the native 'masses' is a truly fearful and wonderful one; but it is certainly a feather in the caps of these simple people that they should have succeeded in learning it at all.

As time went on and schools multiplied, the shrewd, younger generation came to realize that to be less instructed than their neighbours was to be at a serious disadvantage. Their desire for 'higher' education also increased: especially after a number of native students had been sent

to France, whence they returned completely cured of conservatism, and far more 'French' than any Frenchman! Eventually a 'Franco-Native' education scheme was started, leading by progressive stages and examinations to University standard: schools for advanced studies were opened in the principal towns, and at Hanoi a University with schools of Medicine and Law, where native students have the same facility to qualify as in Europe. One most valuable result of this is that more than two hundred native doctors are now caring for the health of the native populations.

Yet in spite of all this, Indo-China, like all Eastern countries in process of 'Westernization', is full of contrasts and contradictions. Education is creeping farther and farther out into the wilds of the protectorates; but even so, like water distributed by irrigation, it can trickle only along given channels, and cannot broadcast its benefits beyond a certain distance on either side. Thus, the educational influence of the West, so strong in the towns, flows along the 'Routes Coloniales' and their offshoots. But once beyond them, even if it is only a mile or so, you will find yourself back among the old unchanging things: little altars in the forests to avert the wrath of whatever gods may be; and primitive people with bare shelters for homes, defenceless from the menace of tigers and bandits—knowing no more about modern French education than their forefathers did of Sanskrit.

Sowing the seed of knowledge may be a beneficent act: but it is just about as profitable for the sowers, and as dangerous, as sowing dragons' teeth; the resultant crop is apt to prove full of unpleasant surprises. The effect of Western education upon the once placid peoples of the East, is to implant in the breasts of thousands of young men who would otherwise be peacefully tilling the soil, or pursuing some other harmless avocation, a desire to wear European clothing and become clerks in offices: to do 'writing work', as they express it. Consequently, wherever we of the West have scattered our educational seed, huge crops of native clerks have sprung up, quite reasonably efficient to carry out a simple office

but hopelessly unfitted for the job for which Nature and their fathers bred them.

So long as the 'boom' years continued, it did not matter much. The Chinese 'kerani'; the Javanese 'djeroe toelis', and their equivalents in the Indo-Chinese States, were valuable members of their respective communities, all hard at work coining money in the high-strung decade that followed the War, and were not too noticeably superfluous. But when, with the 'depression', the demand for these clerkly youths decreased, there was no corresponding decrease in the products of the great and beneficent work of Education; for it is a work which, once started, refuses to stand still. So its activities multiplied; more and more of the simple became sophisticated, and the problem more and more involved.

A pathetic example of the futility of Western education for some types of Oriental, was a weedy Cambodian youth I met one day on a motor-'bus journey. He was dressed in a dirty light flannel suit of Western cut; grubby, once-white canvas shoes; felt hat; and crumpled collar and tie which he kept nervously adjusting, as though unaccustomed to its restriction. The hand he raised to it was delicately slender, adorned with an ornate ring, but most unappetizingly dirty, and the over-long, beautifully shaped nails were black-rimmed. He was never still. When he was not fidgeting with his tie, he would take out a pocket-comb and glass and arrange his hair, carefully regarding the result from all angles. This done, he would dive into a sagging pocket and bring out a tiny square of grimy, cream-coloured 'fuji' silk, bordered with crochet, with which he dabbed first one eye and then the other, examining their watery weakness in the glass as he did so.

Turning to me with what was evidently meant to be an 'air' in the midst of all these titivations (I was the only European on the 'bus, and he probably felt it incumbent upon him to play the Frenchman, and do the honours), he politely enquired my business; going on to tell me that he had just come back from Paris after four years there as a student. I asked him his impressions. 'Pas mal,' was the reply: and 'pas mal' was about the sum of his comments

upon whatever subject was introduced, through a whole gamut from Angkor to aeroplanes. Though he certainly went to the other extreme when I asked what subject he had been to Europe to study, and he replied with a shrug that only Paris could have taught him: 'Oh—everything!'

I tried to picture him in his proper setting: something very humble, I fancy (for he had none of the marks of 'quality' so noticeable in well-bred natives), and in the dress of his own people; and it seemed to me that if he had never been caught in the net of European 'culture', he would have been just a nice, decent, harmless little fellow, instead of the miserable nondescript he was.

But whatever the dangers and pitfalls of giving the Eastern native a Western education, it is certain that nothing but good can come out of the admirable scheme by which the French are reviving the dying arts of the once highly cultured peoples under their protection; and it is fitting that this work should have begun in Cambodia, where those arts reached such perfection in ancient times. Few, probably, of the tourists who hurry through Phnom Penh on their way to Angkor, realize that the exceptionally beautiful Museum, with its high-peaked curving roofs and richly carved doors, is not only a repository of Khmer treasures, but a forcing-house for the crafts whose seed the Khmers have transmitted to their descendants.

It is known as the 'Museum'; but in actual fact it is a school in the first place and a museum in the second; and the story of its origin deserves to be much better known than it is, for it illustrates a vision and idealism all too rare among the 'protectors' of Asiatic races; and it bids fair to bring about a renaissance that looked until recently a forlorn hope.

With the coming of the French (as so often happens when foreign influences have free play among Eastern peoples) the novelty of imported European goods distracted attention from old familiar things; and the protection and support that the King and native aristocracy had always given to the arts was more and more withdrawn. So one by one the old craftsmen with the secrets of their

crept sadly back to the ricefields to earn a humble living; and the decorative crafts, which till then had managed to survive centuries of almost unceasing wars, bade fair to die out at last under a régime of peace. A faint attempt was made to rescue them when in 1907 the king's patronage was revived to some extent, and workshops were opened again in the Palace precincts: to which was later added a small school, whose products were sold to visitors; but the experiment was not a success.

In 1913 Henri Marchal (afterwards for many years Conservator of Angkor) drew public attention to the neglect of the ancient native crafts; and two years later the 'Society of Friends of Angkor' put forward a scheme for a school to foster these arts before the few surviving experts should have died out. Eventually George Groslier, on his return from war service, was invited by the Governor-General, M. Albert Sarraut, to organize the scheme; and his programme—which emphasized that the instruction should be in the true native arts, without any attempt to influence or 'improve' them—being adopted without reserve, a credit of 150,000 piastres was voted. The same year the Cambodian king issued a decree transforming the 'Royal School' at the Palace workshops into a 'School of Cambodian Arts' combined with a Cambodian museum, placing both under French control.

The building that embodies M. Groslier's scheme is in itself a tangible expression of the whole idea. Its style and lay-out; its roofs, eaves, frontons and decoration, all follow faithfully the true Khmer or Cambodian method, so unmistakable to those who know it; and it is, moreover, a reconstruction, probably not far from the truth, of the palace that once stood on the Elephant Terrace at Angkor Thom. Its lofty galleries and class-rooms open on to charming courtyards, lawns and gardens, just as, no doubt, did the rooms of the palaces of long ago; and the whole of its decoration was done by native craftsmen and their pupils. The magnificently carved doors and shutters are their most notable achievement, as well as the most interesting for comparison with the carvings of Angkor. The centre door, measuring 16 feet by 7, was carved in 45 days by

eight old craftsmen and ten of their pupils. 'We want you to make this like a door of Angkor!' said M. Groslier to them. 'Let us see that you are worthy sons of your forefathers!'—whereupon they tackled the task as though it were some delightful game.

The new school 'caught on' with the natives beyond all anticipations, and more than a hundred pupils appeared within three weeks of the doors being opened. A score or more would-be students for whom there was no room were soon always to be seen waiting on the chance that vacancies might occur, asking no more than a square yard of space in which to sit, and a scrap of paper on which to draw.

Somehow or other the welcome news filtered through to the old men in the ricefields and forests, that the skill they had thought despised and forgotten was needed again; and in they came hastening, rubbing stiffened hands, conning over details of processes untouched, perhaps, for twenty years, but happily too deeply engraved in memory to be forgotten. The experts in each craft were not only appointed teachers, but grouped together in 'corporations', to produce articles for sale through the school, by which they are paid cash on their work being passed as satisfactory.

These 'Corporations Cambodgiennes' achieved immediate success; and a series of articles by M. Groslier in the *Révue Indo-chinoise*, setting out the details of his scheme, attracted such attention as to result in the formation of similar schools and 'corporations' in other parts of Indo-China on the Cambodian model. The work of all these groups won high praise at the last Paris Exhibition.

A visit to the classrooms at Phnom Penh disperses all doubt as to the quality of the seed that is being cultivated. On all sides there is the sure touch, the quiet earnestness and infinite patience that are the hall-mark of the Eastern craftsman. Students enter the school at fifteen, starting with a course of drawing; first copying the flowing patterns of the Khmer mouldings, working up by degrees to intricate designs from the infinite variety of medallions

of three months the students start to learn the technique of their chosen craft: modelling, wood-carving, sculpture, bronze-casting, furniture-making, the art of the goldsmith or silversmith, or (for girls) weaving. The usual period of tuition is two years, at the end of which a leaving-certificate is given.

The ancient art of weaving has lived on more robustly in Cambodia than the other arts, no doubt owing to the need to supply the bonzes with their coarse cotton robes and the people with their simple garments. But at Phnom Penh there is now being fostered the creation of the same gorgeous fabrics as those worn by the great Cambodian kings and nobles. A Cambodian lady acts as instructress, and is to be seen every day at her hand-loom, on which the lovely patterns in their mellow colourings seem to grow like flowers under her magic touch. At the other looms in the same room her pupils (who also, to ignorant Western eyes, seem very expert) work on less difficult designs. A small-size sampot, on the loom of the mistress of her craft, takes about a fortnight in the making.

Admirable work is done by the carvers and sculptors. An 'exhibition piece' in the shape of a tall chest, covered with intricately carved copies of Angkorian designs, occupies a well-deserved place of honour in their workshop; side by side with the lace-like delicacy of miniature objects chiselled with tiny tools on wood highly polished as a billiard-ball.

Perhaps the most interesting of the arts that are being revived in these remarkable studios is that of making the exquisite little bronzes—some of them copies of treasures found buried, or dredged up from the bed of the River Mékong—and others taken from figures on the bas-reliefs; a collection of these forms a delightful little exhibition of its own in a special department of the museum, with the added charm to the visitor that everything in it is for sale. Their creators never so much as glance up from their task, if a stranger stops beside them to watch some dainty little figure, measuring perhaps three or four inches from top to toe, being modelled in black wax from which the cast

stage. Some of these fairy dancing figures, with their fine-pointed head-dress, their bracelets and ornaments, their lotus-buds and back-curving slender fingers, exact facsimiles in miniature of the Apsaras of the Angkor carvings and of the living Cambodian dancers of to-day, take more than three months to finish; and they may be bought from the collection exhibited at the museum, or any desired design will be copied for you to order, and posted free of all Customs complications to any part of the world, for the absurd sum of three or four piastres upward. Besides the dancers, there is the Buddha seated in meditation on the coils of Naga-Raja, with the serpent's seven heads spread protectingly behind him; there is Ganeça, the Elephant God, son of Siva, in a jewelled head-dress, or 'mukuta', holding his trunk in one hand; there are Garudas and Rakshas and Nagas, bearded heads of Siva, and multiple-armed gods from the Brahman pantheon, and bronze vessels and ornaments—all executed with a skill of which the Angkor craftsmen would surely have had no need to be ashamed.

The same may be said of the silver and goldwork, which also is copied from ancient models; the deeply cut designs, which have almost the effect of very fine carving, are executed by pressing the soft metal with a pointed tool into a bed of wax which is afterwards removed. The beautiful little goblets and vessels and boxes thus made are also to be bought at ridiculously low prices. It can surely be only the modest failure of the Corporations Cambodgiennes to advertise themselves, that prevents the products of these recreated arts from having a world-wide fame, and a demand that might do much to stimulate the life of the arts themselves.

The most popular of the arts among pupils is that of the goldsmith and silversmith: a fact no doubt due to the passion of Cambodians of all classes for jewelry and worked metal, which makes its production the most remunerative. Even in the humblest native dwelling it is rare that a silver tobacco- or betel-box is not to be found; and the poorest woman will try to borrow some sort of ornament to wear on any special occasion, if she does not possess one.

NATIVE CARVERS OF BALI

A present-day reincarnation of the Khmer sculptors of Angkor

Any money saved, even by peasants, is sure to be converted into gold ornaments; the more rings, buttons, bangles and chains the merrier—and the better investment! Among the more unusual ornaments affected by Cambodians are the little gold or silver filagree bands worn round the strand of hair left uncut at the ceremonial shaving of children's heads, and the toe-rings worn by young girls up to the time of their marriage.

It is not surprising that the goldsmith's art should have flourished in a country whose temples have always been adorned with pure golden images of the gods; and where everything used by the king was made of the precious metal. Gold embroidery, golden drinking-cups and plates and bowls, funereal urns, betel-boxes, tobacco-boxes, and even spittoons; a golden throne and golden furniture have always been the accepted equipment of the royal palace; and if the historians are to be believed, the towers of the royal residences and temples were plated with gold-leaf. Times have changed; but there are still enough specimens of the goldsmith's art in the palace at Phnom Penh to fill a gallery of a museum.

Watching all the intent figures at work in the museum studios it is easy to transport them in imagination to the galleries of Angkor, and to see them as their ancestors must have been, chipping tirelessly away, with the same unhurrying dexterity, at the endless panorama of its walls, or working in quiet corners at the other decorative crafts, as to-day you may still find the natives in Bali, a small island off the east coast of Java. Comparison with Bali is of great value and interest to the student of Angkor, because, so far as I know, the Balinese are the only people now living who appear to possess exactly the same contradictory combination of traits which must have characterized the ancient Khmers. The people of Bali still build and adorn temples to the glory of the Brahman gods. They, too, are a primitive peasant people, whose religion and arts were brought to them by colonists from India; and, retaining the Brahman faith, they have kept vigorously alive many of the arts that came with it; those same arts—or some of them—that were so nearly dead in Cambodia

when a Frenchman's magic wand wakened the dormant seeds to life.

No such wand was needed in Bali. The people are simple folk enough: but the decorative arts seem to be as natural to them as breathing. There are temples in every town and village—dozens of them—humble erections, of course, compared with the stupendous architecture of the Khmers, but of attractive design, and all lavishly adorned with carving. This, though it may lack the inspired variety of the Khmer ornamentation, is beautiful nevertheless, and the style, and many of the subjects are so closely related as to prove unmistakably their common origin. The Garuda and the Rakshas especially, and the same flowing leaf patterns as those that abound on the Angkor mouldings, now being copied by young Cambodian students, are everywhere. It is a common sight in Bali to see half a dozen or so sculptors perched up on a bamboo scaffolding, at work on the decoration of a wall or archway: one perhaps drawing the design with a lump of charcoal, and the others chipping away with neat little chisels mounted in bone, which they make themselves—and to me these humble artists do more than all the archæologists can do to bring back a picture of the constructors of Angkor. They will tell you, if you ask them, that they are not paid, but are provided with food by the people of the village, who have joined forces to defray the cost of the work. I have sometimes asked them where they learnt to carve, and how they knew the pattern that they drew on the stone with such assurance; and they would reply (looking as surprised at my stupid question as though I had enquired how they knew the way to cook their rice!) that 'everybody could do it', or else that ' they had seen other people doing it and copied them'.

I have sometimes come across, in Bali, carved in relief on the wall of a road-cutting, probably in an idle moment, a design of two or three figures full of life and character, very reminiscent of the groups on some of the Angkor frontons. And in almost any Balinese village, the children will run up the moment they see a stranger, with bundles done up in pieces of grubby cotton stuff, which they care-

fully unwrap to show exquisite tiny ornaments, as fine as lace, cut in coco-nut shell; or whole coco-nuts, delicately carved into fragile openwork balls like a Chinese ivory. Yet these humble and truly remarkable artists regard their work so much as a matter of course (since there are few of them who cannot do it) and set so little value upon it, that they are delighted to sell it for a few coppers.

Just such an instinctive art as this must have been general among the creators of Angkor, and it is strange that it should not have survived. For the countless miles of Khmer carving could only have been accomplished by people who, like the Balinese to-day, were artists not by training but by the grace of the Gods.

The survival or disappearance of these closely related arts opens up some pretty problems. A solution often suggested is that Brahmanism was the spiritual force that inspired them, whether in India, Cambodia, Bali, or Java. Yet the Javanese rose under Buddhism to the heights that created the glorious Boroboedoer; and have forgotten all their arts nowadays except the simplest; a fact which is claimed to be a result of their conversion to Islam. That the Cambodian arts have languished is often attributed to the more indolent cult of Buddhism that displaced the Brahman gods. But on the other hand, it has needed no Brahman pantheon to inspire the universal artistic instinct of China and Japan.

And so, like most of the riddles of the East, the problem remains unanswered.

It is the avowed aim of the French to equip the native races under their protection to play their part worthily in the struggle for existence that modern developments have thrust upon a forcibly awakened Asia. It may be, as M. André Siegfried has said, that the only lasting influence that Europe can exert on the East is that of materialism; and most people who have lived long among Oriental peoples will be inclined to agree with him. It is only too probable that, in Indo-China as elsewhere, the chief reason why the present generation has changed its attitude to Western education is the discovery that there is a lot

new delights of motor cars and motor 'buses and the rest, mean more to most of them than even the revival of their own lost arts. Whether the West is really conferring a benefit upon the East in 'westernizing' it, is a very debatable point; but if the West can leaven its material teachings, as the French are doing in Cambodia, by trying to awaken an art that has lain dormant in the spirit of a people, as the glorious earlier creations of that art have lain hidden in the forests—then not even the most cynical of critics can doubt that the effort is worth while.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FOLLOWERS OF STRANGE GODS

Religion has played a leading part in the Cambodian drama. Without it there would have been but little of old Angkor for the historians to puzzle over. For it was religion alone that was the superlative, irresistible force which raised Angkor's stupendous temples; and even though human flesh and blood served as the medium of their erection, they were still, as native tradition has it, 'built by the gods.' No other power save a transcendent belief—mingled with fear—in those tremendous and terrible deities could have inspired mere human material to such superhuman achievements; which seem to us of the West (accustomed to a religious devotion expressed in terms of smug concrete churches and red-brick conventicles in new building areas) nothing short of miracles. Truly 'there were giants in those days'; and they knew well how to do honour to their gods.

Spiritual belief is a far more living force in the East than in the West. Asia was the cradle of all religions—including our own; and, before them, of that primitive pantheism in which Man's instinctive desire to worship first found expression: in which everything in Nature was deified; and which, modified into the animism that endows all these things with a living spirit, is still the fundamental belief of all Eastern peoples, mingled with whichever of the later religions they may have accepted.

The Khmers, or Cambodians, were no exception to the rule. And whenever it may have been that the Indian colonists came among them, bringing both the Brahman and Buddhist doctrines, the new faiths melted into the new, just as the two imported religions often merged into one another. There is much divergence of opinion as to which of the two predominated; but that both flourished there is no question. It was probably Mahayana (or 'Great Vehicle') Buddhism, with its passive acceptance of the

Brahman pantheon, and its use of the same language—Sanskrit—that was practised in old Cambodia; and of the Brahman Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva), it was Siva, 'the Auspicious,' who was given pre-eminence. The kings had their own special royal cult, deifying themselves as king-gods in the 'Linga', 'the phallic symbol of Siva's creative power. Siva's wives, Durga, 'the Inaccessible,' and Kali, 'the Black'; Vishnu and his goddess Laksmi, 'the Fortunate,' are also represented in the Angkor temples; but Brahma appears very seldom. There are some twin deities of Siva and Vishnu in one body, called Hari-Hara; the Trinity in man[illegible]guises; and a host of minor divinities, with occasionally an element of fire-worship in its symbol, the 'Sacred Flame'.

One of the strangest elements in the Khmer religion was the belief that a human soul could enter into a statue. On the death of a king, or person of noble birth, an image—often of gold—of a selected god was made, on entering which, the departed became completely identified with the deity, and known by its name: whence arose the confusing fact that all persons mentioned in the inscriptions have to be identified by two different names, their deeds in life being ascribed to one, and their virtues as remembered after death to the other.

This belief had its less pleasing manifestations: as, for instance, the custom of burying men alive at the gateways of cities, so that their spirits might enter the stone Demons placed there to frighten away enemies. It is not pleasant to conjure up the scenes that must have accompanied the setting up of the files of giants guarding the causeways at Angkor Thom and elsewhere. We know from the Cambodian 'Statute Book that burial alive was a usual method of execution; but the prisons would have needed to be very full of miscreants awaiting the death-penalty to supply enough spirits to go round: nor would these spirits have been of the valiant quality required. Far more likely that it was some of their bravest fighting men who were crushed to death under the weight of those menacing stone figures; and for all we know it may be those gallant spirits, inhabiting them still, that have preserved them through the centuries for us to marvel at.

The power and wealth of 'the Church', in whatever form, in Angkor, must have been boundless, to judge by the endless lists of valuable goods and chattels offered by pious persons for its enrichment. Those recorded include slaves, buffaloes, cattle, horses, chariots, boats, and palanquins by hundreds; gold, silver, and precious stones, plantations, fields, and temple building-sites, or the erection of the temples themselves. A further proof of power is the number of inscriptions setting forth the awful penalties awaiting those who dared to violate temple property. Theft, cutting down trees, trespassing upon temple precincts, or even upon land destined for their future use, all qualified the transgressor for infernal tortures to last 'as long as the sun and moon'.

The fusion of the ancient belief in the Naga-Raja, the Serpent-King founder of the race, with imported Buddhism, resulted in one of the most beautiful motifs in Khmer sculpture: that of the Buddha seated in meditation upon a throne formed of the Naga's coils, with the seven serpent heads reared fanwise behind that of the Master. One legend even presents the Buddha as the Naga himself, in which guise he repels the attacks of Mara, Spirit of Evil. Another relates how the Buddha was overtaken by the seasonal rains while meditating beside a lake inhabited by the divine serpent: who, making himself of enormous size, piled up his coils in the form of a shelter, roofed with his seven heads, making a refuge where the Holy One could pursue his meditations in peace.

When the curtain rose again seventy years ago, after a gap of six or seven centuries, the religious scene had changed. Hinayana ('Lesser Vehicle') Buddhism, as practised in Siam, with Pali as its sacred language, had become the national faith; but, despite the greater orthodoxy of this school, the old tolerant traditions still survived. Many modern Buddhist temples are decorated with Vishnu, Indra, or Hamsa, the sacred goose; images of the Buddha, Vishnu and Siva will be found side by side; or on an altar to Buddha will stand the bull Nandi, Siva's favourite mount.

before images of Brahman gods, handed down from ancient times, that he takes his accession oath, sworn 'by Sun and Moon, Fire, Water, Wind, Forests, and Mountains'. It is administered by Brahman priests: members of the Baku, a caste who, according to native tradition, have retained their special privileges during more than six centuries of Buddhist rule. To them is accorded the supreme honour of guarding the Sacred Sword. Seven of their number are elected by each successive king as special priests, called Putohita, who may marry royal princesses; and tradition says that if ever the royal line should fail, a ruler may be found among them. It is a further proof of the curious combination of religions that these Brahman priests go in boyhood to Buddhist monasteries, have their heads shaven, and become temporarily bonzes; but let their hair grow again when they undertake their special Brahman functions.

As of old, the local gods are not forgotten. The general name for them is 'Neak-ta', and they include the spirits that inhabit mountains, rivers, trees and animals: to whom the natives believe the care of all these things was confided by Indra—a Brahman god. Little altars to these spirits and deities are often to be seen by the roadside or in the forest, and their aid is sought in all times of sickness or trouble.

The modern Cambodian bonze wears voluminous yellow cotton draperies, dyed locally in the villages with saffron, and Tchou Ta-Kuan's description of them would apply equally well to-day. There is a long langouti, or skirt, reaching almost to the ground; a straight piece of stuff like a wide scarf, rolled up snakewise, hung over the left shoulder and tied under the right arm; and another large piece draped somewhat like a toga. The head, beard, and eyebrows are all shaven.

Wherever you go, up and down Cambodia, in town or country, the bonzes are always in evidence. As you drive along the endless straight roads that stretch across the flat landscape like strips of ribbon pinned on a board, you see, every now and then, a splash of yellow, bright as a sun-

you approach closer, resolves itself into two bonzes, walking one in front of the other, usually carrying big white cotton umbrellas to shade their shaven heads. Often behind them are two tiny boys, sometimes dressed in a ragged imitation of the monks' habit—obviously made of 'cast-offs'—or else in next to nothing at all. They carry the 'bats' or wooden begging-bowls; for these good monks see no sense in adding unnecessary burdens to the religious life on a long journey. As their rules enjoin, they usually go about in pairs; but sometimes they take their walks abroad alone, and the yellow splash along the road may be one waving vigorously for the 'bus to stop. When this happens, the same little comedy is always played: the bonze, accustomed to expect everything to be given him for the asking (his religion, when strictly observed, forbids him to possess anything except that given him by the charitable) and accustomed, moreover, to the respect always paid by his lay compatriots to his religious dress, makes, naturally enough, for an empty seat. This is inevitably one of those reserved (by a recent, much-needed regulation) for Europeans: a Paradise out of which he is heartlessly thrust by the conductor, to sit on the knees and among the piled-up impedimenta of the native passengers in the seats behind! Religious regulations also enjoin that the bonze shall carry no money. But this rule has to give way before the remorseless commercialism of modern life. Formerly he would have been allowed free passage. But now he produces a little purse from somewhere beneath the yellow drapery, and pays the few cents demanded for the fare.

Best of all times to see the bonzes is in the early morning in a country town, when they set out in procession with their 'bats' to beg the day's provisions. The feeding of these religious medicants being an accepted obligation in all Buddhist countries, the shopkeepers (who in Cambodia are mostly Chinese, and profess the Buddhist faith) arrange it among themselves; and you may see a long line of bonzes following each other in single file past the open shop-fronts,

others dried fish, vegetables of all kinds, cakes, and fruits. As the procession approaches, someone—usually a woman—appears from the interior of each shop, and these licensed beggars are served one after the other, first with a ladle of steaming rice, and then from each dish in turn—but always at arm's length, with a very long-handled spoon; for it is a rule of the bonzes that they may not receive alms direct from the hand of a woman, which might expose them to temptation. At Siem Réap one morning I saw fourteen of these picturesque figures marching in a string across the river from the monastery to the town. The begging-bowls of the first eight in the line were covered with the yellow robes, which flowed over them like circular capes from the wearers' shoulders (giving them an absurd resemblance, if the truth be told, to expectant mothers). The six that followed had disposed their garments differently, leaving arms and shoulders bare, and their bowls in full view. What the special regulation was that they were fulfilling, I was unable to discover; but they made an unforgettable picture. And there is no question that a religion that can provide such charming splashes of colour has very much to recommend it, quite apart from any more serious claims.

Though the modern Cambodian has travelled far from the superstitious awe with which religion overshadowed his ancestors, it may be that something of its influence survives in the punctilious respect that he is so careful to show to both monks and monasteries. The most 'Westernized' of young natives will jump off his bicycle, remove his ultra-smart felt hat or hideous cloth cap, and stand at attention until a bonze, met on the road, has passed by; and the driver of motor 'bus or hired car will take off his hat when he meets one, even when he passes the gate of a bonzery. An ingenuous young Cambodian of my acquaintance, who had been as a boy to school with the bonzes, had much of interest to say about them. They led, he said, a truly monastic life; and though they were housed and fed and given instruction free of cost, they were

meal in the day (at eight in the morning); and when the drum sounded at night, they must return to the bonzery to sleep, for a bonze found abroad after dark would be disgraced; and if ever one should fall into the most universal of human transgressions, he was irrevocably damned and dismissed the order, even though he might have behind him a lifetime of untarnished devotion. The morning meal was served on the bonzes' return from the begging round, the menu consisting of their contributions and other food brought in their absence by the charitable to the monastery. There was another very light 'snack' at midday, and that was all. The rules against eating in the evening were especially strict.

It is a usual practice for boys to be sent into the bonzeries temporarily as 'Nen' or postulants for periods varying from three months upwards. This is the case with the sons of royalty and nobles as well as with commoners; and once within the monastery, no distinctions are made; boys of all classes are on exactly the same footing. They may enter at any time between the ages of seven years and twenty: the latter being the youngest at which the full vows may be taken. Thus most Cambodians even of the upper class have served their time in their youth with the begging-bowl; and many penniless young men adopt the yellow gown as a means to an easy livelihood, for there is nothing binding in the vows, and they may be renounced at any time with the consent of the 'Luk Sang Kreach'—the head of the bonzery: which consent is never withheld.

A bonze's ordination, however, is a ceremony that one would have thought would not be lightly undertaken. The candidate's head is first shaven, and he changes his clothes; he is then put through a ritual that would tax the memory of an accomplished Freemason, as a prelude to a sermon on human frailties and the certainty that the body is doomed to perish. This is followed by the Commandments; which include injunctions not to kill anything, even a fly, or cut down a tree unless to build or repair a temple; never to eat after midday; not to sing or dance; not to

'Are you epileptic?'; 'Are you a slave?'; 'Are you in debt?'; 'Are you really a man, and not an evil spirit in the form of a man?'

The depressing ceremony concludes with the 227 Precepts attributed to the Buddha. Some of them might have been specially framed to fit the temptations into which a young Cambodian bonze would be in danger of falling. For instance: 'Never sit in the shade where there are women'; 'Never take the same way on a lonely road as a woman, except for the purpose of protecting her in case of danger'; 'If you should be obliged to converse with a woman, say only a few words'; 'Never touch a woman's hand nor her hair'; 'Never enter a boat in which there is a woman.' He must be so careful of his chastity that when he goes on horseback he must never ride a mare; and his decorum must be impeccable: 'Always cover your body decently with your dress, even when you are alone in the forest.'

Bodily ease is an allurement to be resisted, as witness: 'Never sit in a padded chair.' And there are some rules of general behaviour which might be quite as profitably noted by our Bright Young People as by a poor young Buddhist bonze: 'Never shout with laughter, talk loudly, or gesticulate rudely'; 'Never swing your body when walking'; 'When your mouth is full, you should not talk'; 'Never point your finger at anyone.' Let us hope, however, that not even our brightest moderns would need the warning: 'Do not lick your fingers'; 'Do not make noises in the mouth when eating'; and it is hard to imagine anyone being so indiscreet as to 'preach before a person who is armed with a stick, or even with an umbrella'; but it does suggest that practical ways of discouraging long-winded discourses are not unknown to Buddhism.

The Buddhists who have been in Cambodia since Buddhism became the State religion—which is surmised to be about six hundred years—belong to the Mohanikay sect. It is to these that all the strict rules quoted apply, and who represent the large majority of Buddhist bonzes

when called upon, by throwing their influence with the people into the scale. There is, however, another sect which is less of an asset to the community: the Thommayuts; an offshoot of the Mohanikays of Siam, and a comparatively recent importation into Cambodia. Of these the rules are far less strict, and one of them is to 'assert their independence': by which it may be assumed that they are merely a sign of the unrestful times we live in. They are at present happily very much in the minority. A few years ago there were only a hundred of them in Phnom Penh in five bonzeries, out of a total of more than 1,600 in twenty-two bonzeries.[1]

Before the extension of the road system in the last decade or two, and the development of motor transport, the bonzeries and their 'salas' for the use of travellers, served as rest-houses for all travelling Europeans, as well as natives. A genuine welcome was always to be relied upon; and when the visitor had paid his respects to the head of the monastery, it was the custom for the monks to bring coco-nuts, the native token of welcome, and afterwards gifts of eggs and fowls. The eggs were apt to be rather 'fruity' for European tastes, for the Cambodians do not care for them until, like our game, they have lost the first crude freshness of youth; so that the guests had often to exercise much tact! No woman ever appeared at the sala if the guest was a man travelling alone; but if he should be accompanied by his wife, then every woman, young and old, from the surrounding hamlets, would come to 'call': very shy at first, but soon, overcome by curiosity, eager to touch the hair and skin, and even the eyes, of their queer white sister. But nowadays all that has changed. It is seldom, except far afield, that Europeans call on the bonzes for hospitality; and the motor 'bus services have cured all who live within reach of them of their one-time shyness.[2]

In the same way the pressure of modern conditions has forced even the orthodox bonzes, with no desire to 'assert

[1] P. Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens.* (Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Challamel, Paris.)

their independence', to modify to some extent the strict reading of the 227 Precepts. No longer do they hold fans before their faces when they walk abroad (as described by one of the early explorers) to protect them from errant feminine glances; they cross rivers in ferries in which women are their fellow-passengers, and ride cheek by jowl with them in motor 'buses; they carry money to pay their fares like other folk, or for an occasional cooling drink of palm-juice. But that they set a standard of decent conduct there is no question. For the most part they are gentle, good-natured, peaceable people, curiously resembling in expression the statues of the Buddha they worship. Those who know them well say that they are quite devoid of greed or ambition, and contented with their chosen lot; and that, unlike the members of many other priesthoods, they are never guilty of exploiting the poor.

It is rather the fashion to deplore the existence of these thousands of unproductive human drones, as a retrograde factor likely to hamper modern Cambodia's progress towards development and prosperity. But I am not so sure. It may be true—it probably is—that the almost universal custom among the male population of spending some time during the susceptible years of boyhood in a bonzery, intensifies their natural racial tendency to dreamy contemplation: which is not a quality calculated to 'get them there' in the helter-skelter race for Heaven-knows-where in which the whole modern world is joining. But I doubt very much whether any of them (except the few who have imbibed the precepts of Moscow) have any desire to compete. Western civilization can give them much: communications and transport; the means of reviving their peaceful arts; and all things that tend to make the life of a simple population happier and healthier than it had been under a régime of slavery. But it would be doing them a poor service to train and enter them for the unending struggle to compete in the world's arenas.

Safety in which to produce enough for his humble needs, and to live as pleasantly as may be, is the average Cambodian's modest ambition; and in such a community the bonzes have a real value. Their influence is great

and their example excellent; and Europeans who have lived long in the country agree that it is to them that the general good behaviour of the people may be attributed. Many of the older monks are knowledgeable men in other matters beside religion—in medicine especially—and are able to help cases of sickness which the government medical service, despite their utmost endeavours, would never hear of or reach. As Paul Collard says: 'The bonze is priest, doctor, and adviser. He consoles, heals and teaches. The part he plays in Cambodian society is of the first importance. He is a sort of beneficent genius, whose influence penetrates insensibly to the heart of every household.'[1]

Religion was the most potent factor in old Cambodia; at all events it was responsible for the splendid relics of its glory that still endure. And it may be that it will still be religion, in the shape of the bonzes, that is destined to play a leading part, though a less tangible one, in the next chapter of its history. Not as a constructive force, but a defensive one; silently opposing itself to the intangible dangers born of the very benefits that the West has bestowed . . . from the effects of the too-heady nectar of Education and Progress, potent as any of the armies that marched against Angkor in the past, to menace and destroy the people's peace.

[1] P. Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*. (Société d'Éditions Géographiques. Challamel, Paris.)

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE WAGES OF SIN

The observant Tchou Ta-Kuan left behind him a vivid picture of the thirteenth-century Khmer king, as he dispensed justice daily from his Council-Chamber above the Elephant Terrace. And we need be in no doubt as to what manner of justice it was; owing to the fact that down to quite modern times Cambodian Law claimed still to be that of the ancient Kings: founded on the original Law of Manou, or 'Manova-Dharma Sastra', as revealed by the god Brahma.

It is due to M. Moura, one of the early representatives of the French Government in Cambodia, who translated this curious 'Prah-thomma-sat' or 'Book of the Law',[1] that it is available to students of Khmer history: for whom it has the added charm that far from being the dry-as-dust reading usually associated with legal literature, it is more tightly packed with horrors than any film that ever came out of Hollywood.

It might be well to explain, before going further, that the Cambodian Statute Book, like that of England, contains many rulings and penalties which, though they are 'law' on paper, are never put into practice; and, further, that since the establishment of the French Protectorate, the law of their protégé has been modified in conformity with Western ideas. So that visitors to the country need have no fear that they will find themselves looking out of their bedroom windows—as they might have done fifty years ago if there had been windows to look from!—at any of the gruesome penalties described in the following pages.

The Prah-thomma-sat is bound in many mighty tomes, dealing with every sort of human error and dispute. The best of it (particularly the section dealing with marriage and divorce, which I commend to the notice of Mr. A. P.

Herbert) is well worthy of consideration by Western legislators; and at its worst should at least possess the virtue of deterring even the boldest from committing the crimes for which it ordains such incredibly macabre punishments.

The 'major' crimes in the first category, called in Cambodian 'Ocrut-tus', are a very mixed collection, and not arranged at all in the order you might expect. 'Murder,' for instance, far from heading the list, is quite near the end; and even so it seems that it is not so much the mere murder itself that matters. First and worst of all the crimes you can commit in Cambodia is that of 'entering the country armed'. Next, you must not seize the monks, nor burn the king's palace, temples or monasteries, or the houses of the king's ministers. You must not destroy the sacred books, or kill the king's servants, your father or mother, or anyone else who has brought you up, or a person whom you have incited to steal, in order to possess yourself of what he has stolen. You must not steal images of the gods, or anything else that is 'a basis of religion', and, finally, you must not cut down sacred trees.

Death is the penalty of all these offences. But it is not the mere straight-out death-penalty which is all we have to offer even to our most distinguished criminals. Cambodian law is much more original, and sets out a list of twenty-one varieties, from which the judge may select at his discretion. They are as follows:—

(1) The skin of the head to be broken so that the blood gushes out: a piece of red-hot iron then to be pushed under the skin and the scalp burnt off all over till nothing remains but the bones of the skull.

(2) The head to be completely scalped, so that the skin falls over the forehead and covers the face.

(3) The mouth to be fixed open with a gag and the head forced back; the mouth then to be filled with oil which is set alight with a taper.

(4) The mouth to be cut open to the ears; the head then forced back and a gag inserted, so that the mouth is kept full of blood till the condemned person dies.

(6) The skin to be cut in strips from the neck to the ankles, and the condemned beaten until he expires.

(7) The criminal to be skinned from neck to loins, in such a way that the skin falls like a skirt over the lower part of the body.

(8) The criminal to be pinned to the ground with an iron trident through the body, and a small fire lighted touching him.

(9) Shreds of flesh to be torn or cut out all over the body with a double-bladed sword, and the condemned left to die.

(10) Beginning at the feet, the flesh to be cut off the bones, right up to the head, till there is nothing left but the skeleton.

(11) The flesh to be cut off the body in strips; then with an iron comb the remaining remnants to be scraped off till all is removed.

(12) The condemned to be laid on his side and an iron spike driven through his ears, pinning him to the ground.

(13) All the bones to be broken with a stone, without removing flesh or skin. The condemned to be then folded up in a bundle and thrown aside to die.

(14) The body to be sprayed with boiling oil till death takes place.

(15) Fierce dogs which have been previously starved to be set upon the condemned, letting them tear him to pieces and devour him, and gnaw his bones.

(16) The condemned to be chopped to pieces with an axe.

(17) The condemned to be stabbed lightly with a pike till death ensues.

(18) The condemned to be buried to the waist in a ditch; fires of rice-straw then to be lighted all round him till he is covered with burns, when a plough is to be driven to and fro over him until his body is torn to shreds.

(19) Pieces of the condemned person's flesh to be cut off and fried in oil, which he is to be forced to eat until he succumbs.

(20) The condemned to be slowly beaten to death with a club.

(21) The condemned to be beaten to death with a branch covered with sharp thorns.[1]

There was just one bright spot, however, for the occupant of the condemned cell. The sadistic catalogue concludes with the humane qualification that 'only one of these penalties may be inflicted upon each criminal'; so that he could at least console himself, while he was being scalped or skinned, that he would not presently be sitting down to eat a nice juicy fried steak cut from his own flesh!

It is pleasant to read that, in the year 1621, the King Prah Chey Chesda, decided that the penalties ordained for crimes in the first category were too severe. He adopted a simple means of modifying them without altering or revising the law (which probably the constitution would not have permitted). Leaving the law exactly as it stood, he decreed that an offender found guilty of a crime in the first category should suffer one of the penalties imposed in the second—these being imprisonment for life in different unpleasant varieties of fetters; those guilty of a second-class crime suffering a third-class penalty, and so on. This modification appears to have remained in force down to modern times; for M. Moura notes that despite the awful severity of the written law, executions were rare. The only offenders who could not escape the death penalty were those who had led revolts against the King's authority, or had attempted to interfere with his feminine entourage. And to make things easier, where all other criminals were concerned, everyone in authority could be bought—at a price.

A curious vein of something very like poetic justice runs through the long and elaborate code dealing with marriage and the relations between the sexes, though, as might be expected in an Oriental country, its tendency is distinctly anti-feminist. Cambodian law allows a man to have three legitimate wives, who are arranged in descending scale of importance; and the penalties for their peccadilloes are fixed in proportion to their position and corresponding value to the husband. If, for instance, a man 'borrows' his neighbour's principal wife, the fine he has to pay to the

[1] *Le Royaume de Cambodge*, J. Moura. (Leroux, Paris.)

injured husband is very much higher than if his choice had fallen upon wife number two or number three. But the unfortunate lady in the case, irrespective of her wifely rank, suffers a far more painful punishment for having been found out. Her face is covered with a light cage of split bamboo; a red flower is placed behind each ear, a crown of flowers on her head, and garlands round her neck; and thus adorned she is made to promenade round the town or village, accompanied with drums, publicly confessing her shame in a loud voice as she goes along, and exhorting other women not to follow her bad example.

She may, however, buy herself off; and here the mischievous old Statute Book cracks a not-too-seemly joke. The fine she must pay to escape the public promenade is fixed at 'the price of grass for the king's elephants'—a sum of about £3. The law goes on to explain that as illicit love-making usually takes place in the fields, the grass is crushed, greatly increasing the difficulty of gathering feed for the Royal elephant-stables, which is always a matter of anxiety. This fine is to be divided between the Treasury, the injured husband, and the elephant-keepers.

If a husband should take his wife back after such an indiscretion, he forfeits his share of the fine, which is added to that paid to the Treasury. If the lady should repeat her transgression—or rather if she is so careless as to be caught again—her hair is shaved in strips and she is publicly whipped; and should she let herself be found out yet a third time, the figure of a man is tattooed on her cheeks, and 'no further penalty is inflicted'. One can quite see that it would scarcely be necessary.

If a lady of high degree should stoop to entice the husband of a poor woman, and thereafter treats her humble rival rudely and with contempt, the proud lady's dress is to be torn open; and then, seated on a platform upon pointed sticks, in full view of the public, she is to be beaten with buffalo-hide whips.

In certain cases, the law ordains that illicit lovers shall be harnessed together in a yoke, and paraded about the town for three days to the accompaniment of drums; and if a lover cannot pay his fine to the husband, he must

become his slave. If a free man should have relations with a slave-girl, the slave's owner can demand that the offender shall become his slave also for a certain period. If a woman has two lovers, and one of them should kill the other out of jealousy, the woman is to be decorated with flowers and a bamboo mask as described above, beaten, and placed in the pillory for three days. The victorious lover is either to be put to death or sold as a slave, and his price given to the relatives of the man he has killed.

In all the long list there seems to be only one case in which the Cambodian wife has any chance of getting her own back; and even then it is only by an extremely painful process. If a husband should falsely accuse his wife of 'carrying on' with another man, and in the course of the inevitable argument he insults her and treats her with such violence that blood flows, he can be fined—always provided that she can prove her innocence. And if she forgives him (as even in Cambodia women have sometimes been foolish enough to do) the fine must be paid to her parents.

It is almost startling among all this queer hotch-potch, to find a piece of wisdom which closely resembles the modern enactments in several European countries and in one of the most enlightened of British Dominions. It reads: 'If a husband and wife are both dissatisfied with the bonds that unite them, and desire to divorce, they are free to do so. Because, as these two persons are not content together, they will tend to be unfaithful to each other. It is not their destiny to be together, and it is therefore right that they should separate.'

On the principle, so general throughout the East, that wives are easier to come by than money, the old Cambodian laws relating to debt are exceedingly severe. In most cases the defaulting debtor is condemned to pay his debt in person—that is to say by becoming the slave of his creditor. If a debt is repudiated by a solvent person, he may be seized, and the 'cangue' (a sort of portable pillory) placed on his neck for three months, during which the

three months he is to be handed over to the creditor as his slave until he has paid principal and interest, and in addition a fine equal to the amount of the debt.

If anyone should lend money to a slave without having first consulted his master, and should resort to blows to recover the money with such vigour as to disable the slave for work, the law enacts that the price of the slave must be paid as compensation to the owner. The ten per cent charged by the courts and the costs of the trial are also to be paid by the creditor; but the slave still remains the property of his original owner.

The law in Cambodia—as elsewhere—seems to have been framed chiefly for the benefit of the lawyers; but the 'Prah-thomma-sat' is fond of announcing that it 'has no desire to oppress the poor'. Acting on this principle it occasionally gives a ruling in favour of the debtor: as when, in the case of a creditor who has charged higher interest than the law allows, it deprives him of all interest, and the debtor has his loan scot free. It further announces in an access of generosity to the poor peasant that 'interest on growing crops may not exceed fifty per cent'.

If a debtor is very poor, and owes money to several creditors at once, the judges may 'buy' the luckless debtor for the equivalent of about £4, and divide the amount between the creditors. The debtor then becomes the slave of the judges for six years: after which, he may buy himself back and become a free man again for the same sum, in the unlikely event of his being able to raise it.

Provision is made for sureties when a loan is made. If a debtor should default and disappear, the surety may be made a slave by the creditor, or can buy his freedom for about £10 which is reimbursed to him if the debtor returns or is caught.

According to Tchou Ta-Kuan, trial by ordeal was in vogue in Cambodia in the thirteenth century; and we have the testimony of so modern a traveller as M. Groslier that it was still being practised quite recently. It is all the more interesting to find set out in detail in the Statute

water at the end of a pole (a method, according to M. Moura, which was still popular in his time in the neighbourhood of Angkor); forcing him to plunge the middle finger in molten metal; holding it in the flame of a candle; or throwing accuser and accused into a lake or river to swim across, the winner or survivor being held proved to be in the right. By employing one of these methods, the statute adds, 'The judges will have absolute certainty of arriving at the truth.' The choice of ordeal is left to them; and, 'in pronouncing sentence according to the law, they will themselves escape the punishments of the future life, and will have merited the enjoyment after death of eternal felicity.' If, however, a judge should be convicted of inflicting a wrong penalty, he is ordered to suffer double that penalty himself.

The Cambodian king has always been in his own person the ultimate court of appeal. Below him is an elaborate system of judges, magistrates and police, and severe penalties are provided for failure on the part of these subordinates to report to the higher authority. These penalties include having the mouth slit up; the ears cut off; to wear the cangue for three days; and beatings of varying severity. Similar penalties are ordained for the 'molestation of honest travellers' by the police, and for many other misdemeanours to which they might be tempted: such as imposing and keeping unauthorized fines; releasing thieves and bad characters 'to take root in the country like noxious weeds'; receiving stolen goods; or 'recommending as warders, dishonest persons, drunkards, or persons without a proper sense of right and wrong'.

The duties of the police set out in this comprehensive book of rules, include a responsibility to 'exhort the people to do good, to be charitable, to exercise virtue, and venerate the good spirits, who in return will not fail to seek celestial favours for them. Thus the kingdom will flourish and be preserved from the epidemics and other calamities to which mankind is prone to be afflicted'. (A conception of police obligations refreshingly new to Western experience. The vision of a London constable, earnestly exhorting some recalcitrant motorist to mend his ways for the sake of his

soul's salvation, and his country's good, is most exhilarating!)

There are special regulations for the prisons. If fire should break out and a gaoler fail to release his prisoners, so that they perish, he is to be beaten and imprisoned in place of the victims. On the release of a prisoner at the end of his term, he is charged a fixed sum for 'board', light and 'care' during his imprisonment. How the money is to be raised is not explained.

A prisoner's ration is given as 'one pound of rice per day, and sufficient salt'. The ration might be supplemented if the prisoner had means to pay for other food. At the beginning of the French occupation, and for some time afterwards, it was the custom to march the prisoners down to the markets where they often terrified the vendors into giving them all they wanted. The guards, as miserably fed as the prisoners, looked on without interfering, hoping to profit by their prisoners' violence. Sometimes, however, the market-women took the law into their own hands; and M. Moura describes that he once arrived in the market just in time to save a prisoner from half a dozen furious fishwives, who had got him on the ground, and were doing their best to scratch him to pieces.

Rebels and traitors are condemned to be decapitated and quartered: which after all is no more barbarous than being 'hanged, drawn, and quartered' according to old English law. In Cambodia, however, the head is to be exposed in the market-place, and the quarters at the four corners of the king's palace. The relatives of these poor remnants are doomed to become the slaves of the State.

There is one super-horror in the way of death-penalties that is not included in the First Category; and that is 'Execution by Elephants'. This method of execution, a footnote states blandly, 'is seldom used.' But there are records that it has occasionally been imposed by the kings of Cambodia to punish thieves who had dared to steal, or attempt to steal, a Royal elephant. The culprit was tied to a stake; his eyes were bandaged; and four or five elephants which had previously been infuriated were set

brute would drag up the stake, man and all, with its trunk, and hurl it to the ground; another would put its huge foot upon the victim and tear off his limbs one by one; and all the furious monsters, which were egged on by the keepers, would stab the victim with their tusks, and rush about the enclosure roaring and squealing, their trunks and tusks dripping with blood and shreds of human flesh. The idea, apparently, was that the sight would discourage others who might think of daring to interfere with the king's sacred personal property.

The Temporal Law of Cambodia was cruel enough. But its penalties seem almost caressing compared with the awful retributions awaiting sinners hereafter, under the Spiritual Law of the Brahman faith. The southern gallery of bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat is covered for about 75 yards with pictures of the Last Judgment; and being provided with an abundance of brief descriptive inscriptions, we are left in no doubt as to our deserts. The wall is carved in three tiers, along which the souls of the departed march to their just reward: two of the processions climbing upward to the higher levels, where the delights of Paradise await them; and the third creeping miserably along towards the thirty-eight separate hells prepared for evildoers. There is some similarity between these carvings and Medieval European treatments of the same subject; but the Khmers' show far more originality in regard to the torments of the damned!

The celestial rewards of the virtuous, it must be confessed, look rather tame; and one would imagine that they might easily pall in the course of Eternity. Processions of lords and ladies in sedan-chairs, shaded by parasols, are seen being carried up the slopes to Heaven, which is represented as a palace with thirty-seven towers, divided into three compartments like a railway-carriage. Here the company of the Blessed, seated on thrones, are being fanned by female attendants, while others offer them fruit and gifts. It is evident that the artists who designed this immense tableau imagined Heaven almost entirely populated by lovely serving-maidens and dancing-girls, who, when there was no room for them elsewhere, perched

on the roofs and floated here and there among the towers!

But though Heaven might be monotonous, the same could certainly not be said for the Cambodian idea of Hell. Unlike the Christian Hell, into which sinners of all sorts are presumably to be thrust holus-bolus, the Cambodians provided what they considered a suitable and separate one for every class of deadly sin: in which may be traced the same idea as in their Statute Book. The inscriptions give names to the various hells, according to the particular kind of torment provided: 'Hell of Suffocation,' Hell of Thorn-trees', the 'Frying-Pan', the 'Lake of Blood', the 'Lake of Glutinous Pus', and so on. Those sinners who blaspheme the Gods or the priests are thrown to the 'Mass of Worms'; those who betray confidence or kill women or children, are trussed and rolled up and down the trunks of trees covered with long, sharp thorns; those who 'live in luxury but sin nevertheless' are thrown on fires or stretched out and skinned with a rasp; destroyers of reservoirs have their bones broken to pieces and a stake forced down their throats; men who entice away the wives of others by sorcery are torn by birds of prey or thrown into the unpleasant lake mentioned above; the ladies who tempted them suffer the same fate, to which they are dragged by the hair; trusted officials who abuse their privileges and steal the property of the priests or the poor are suspended head downward in boilers; those who cut down trees belonging to monasteries have their necks fixed in a vice and are hung head downwards; stealers of elephants, horses, palanquins, instruments of sacrifice or shoes—especially from priests—are crucified and fires lighted beneath them, or else pounded in mortars; those who steal only 'shoes or parasols' are thrown on to fires; those who steal flowers, or dare to gather them in gardens sacred to Siva, are roped to trees, where demons hammer long nails into their eyes, or else they are devoured by dogs or vultures. From which it is to be supposed that as in temporal law the direst penalties were earned by offences

A number of special hells seem to have been reserved for other thieves; but unfortunately the inscriptions are too obliterated to reveal what particular forms of theft were indicated. One, of which all that can be deciphered is . . . 'Sita . . . thieves . . . cold . . . ' is evidently a 'cold hell', for the damned are standing in water, shivering, with their arms folded tightly round their breasts in the characteristic attitude of Eastern natives on a chilly morning. Another, whose only remaining description reads: 'Sandra-tamah . . . thieves . . . liars,' shows some unfortunates expiating their sins by having their eyes punched out by demons, or hanging from a rope round the waist, with weights attached to head, hands, and feet, and bodies studded with nails. The last hell shown is for 'misers and pitiless creditors', who are piled up in heaps on bonfires.[1]

Naturally, the revision of so cruel a system of law as that set out in the 'Prah-thomma-sat' was one of the first concerns of the French when they assumed the Protectorate of Cambodia. But although their representatives succeeded in persuading the king to sign decrees instituting reforms, it was long before practical results were obtained. Strangely enough, one of the very first attempts to improve conditions for the population by the abolition of slavery, was violently opposed: not only by the masters, but by the slaves themselves. It is not really so surprising as it sounds. Slavery was so ancient an institution that life without it seemed unthinkable. To abolish it was to dislocate the whole social structure—for it was estimated that about one-third of the population was in slavery to the other two-thirds for debt! That the debts were often generations old did not affect the case. Abolish slavery? . . . It was an unbearable attack on the people's ancient 'liberties'! The slaves were quite as frightened of losing their masters as the masters of losing their slaves. If the system were altered, the slaves argued, how could they pay their debts? and how earn money? Thus it was that the decree signed in 1877 by King Norodom putting an end to slavery, did not come into effect for another twenty years.

[1] All these inscriptions were deciphered and translated by Aymonier, and quoted in his *Cambodge*, vol. iii. (Leroux, Paris.)

Although many debtors and other offenders were nominally only in slavery for certain terms of years, in actual fact they seldom achieved their liberty at all. Any hope they might have had of finding the money to repurchase their freedom was dashed by the 'accounts' (no doubt skilfully doctored) kept by the masters, on which everything alleged to have been broken or lost by the temporary slave was entered, for each of which a further period of service was added. The children of these inherited their slavery; and both they and the thousands of hereditary slaves—descendants of rebels against the king—were as hopelessly downtrodden as the out-castes of India.

These slaves were divided into different groups according to the crime for which they or their parents or ancestors had been forced into slavery. The most severe sentence was that of the Pols Domrey, who had to look after the King's elephants—a heavier punishment than it sounds, for it meant complete slavery all the year round. The next, in descending order, were the Pols Tuk, who served the Royal river-boats; then the Pols Prah, slaves of the temples; the Pols Suoi-Kmvanh, who had to gather Cardamome, a drug which grows only in unhealthy swamps: a sentence which though unpleasant, was less severe, for it left them free except at the season of the year when the plant ripened; and so on through a long list. It can easily be seen that to do away with such a system was a revolutionary measure, and not to be accomplished with the stroke of a pen. But at last, in 1897, through the expert organization of M. Ducos, then Resident Superior of Cambodia, who had had wide experience of law reform in other parts of Indo-China, the change was brought about, and all this huge army of slaves became free men, subject only to fines.[1]

It is difficult to reconcile the modern native of Cambodia as we know him—good-natured, indolent, and rather stupid—with the diabolical cruelties of his national statute-book, and to believe that he must have had among his ancestors those able, if not willing, to inflict them—for the Law must have had its executioners. It is even harder

when you see, as I have, a pathetic, starving, recaptured prisoner chained to a post, ravenously eating ricė with chop-sticks out of a bowl, looking about as dangerous as a lost puppy: to believe that he had murdered two helpless old peasants and burned their miserable shack for no better reason than to steal their tiny handful of possessions . . . yet he had, on his own confession.

Under the beneficent French régime, the old Cambodian statute-book has no terrors. But how much the people who enjoy their present immunity really differ at heart from their forefathers who suffered and inflicted such awful tortures, we shall never know. Their minds are a sealed book to us: and always will be; as secret and mysterious as the lost history of their country.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PILGRIMAGE UP TO DATE

Six or seven years may count but little, if at all, in the history of deserted Angkor; but they count all too much in our fast-moving modern outside world. And many things had happened in the interval between my two pious pilgrimages, which combined to alter the manner of my going. The fine steamer in which I had set sail the first time from Singapore was now among the unemployed, and lay swinging at her rusty anchor chains in the Saigon River. Her place was taken by a small, weather-worn veteran of a few hundred tons, run by the same French company, but originally built for a Dutch one, (as her name-plate, just decipherable under countless coats of paint, proved) in the year of Grace, 1896. I had my first sight of her when the company's manager (the bearer of an historic French name, and one of the rare survivals of the noblesse that the Revolution did its best to exterminate) took me aboard in a launch all shining with white paint and highly polished brasswork; and left me alone, the only passenger, on a tiny deck almost innocent of caulking, and just about as smooth to the feet as a country lane.

A pathetically shabby little ship was the *Merlin*; her paintwork was chipped and rusty; her curtains and linen splotched with great patches of iron-mould; her pipes and taps corroded and leaky; the alleyways to her two tiny bathrooms always awash, so that you had to wait for the ship to roll to reach them dry-shod; everything about her, in fact, was so old that you marvelled how it held together. And yet withal, she was such a stout, snug, friendly little ship; and despite her obvious limitations, most astonishingly comfortable: even luxurious!

It is something, after all, to be shown a whole ship, and invited to take your pick of its entire accommodation; and still more when the Captain (or 'Commandant', as he was called) acts as showman. Would I like to see the

There were two, standing isolated like bathing-machines or garden sheds, one on each side of the deck. 'Cooler, perhaps,' said the Commandant; but added, thoughtfully: 'But you would have to go below for the bath . . . and in rough weather. . . . No?' So we went below, where he displayed the four cabins leading out of the small saloon on each side. 'Then one of these. . . . This one? . . . or this? *C'est tout à vous. Choisissez celle qui vous plait.*' What could be more delightful? I chose one; and the old Tonkinese 'boy' carried my valise down the steep companion, to deposit it in the roomy, shabby cabin; and soon we were rolling out to sea, among the thousand exquisite islands that guard the entrance to the 'Roads'.

The Commandant, having gracefully fulfilled his duties as host, had disappeared to his own deck above; where, representing as he did in his own person the entire navigating staff, he remained conscientiously at his post—except for daily brief inspections of his ship—throughout the three days' voyage. So I had the deck to myself; when presently the old 'boy' appeared: not, as I had expected, to summon me to *déjeûner* at the long, narrow table that ran from end to end of the saloon downstairs, but with a yellow checked tablecloth in his hand, which he proceeded to tie by its four corners to the 3 ft. square teak table (which, with two garden seats and one chair of the same unyielding material, almost filled the tiny shelter deck). '*Vau' mieu' manger içi—en bas très chaud*,' he observed confidentially in his queer clipped French, as he fetched a pillow in an ancient and iron-moulded, but immaculately clean befrilled pillow-case, from one of the deck cabins, and arranged it on the bone-racking teak chair for my greater comfort, before placing a bottle of red wine, a carafe of water, and a long crusty loaf on the check cloth.

Fresh as I was from the polished elaboration of life in a Singapore hotel (with wine on specially festive occasions only, at many dollars per bottle) the meal that he then proceeded to serve to me, as well as the whole manner and setting of it, transported me in a flash eight thousand miles or more—straight into one of the homely, modest

restaurants that are part and parcel of everyday life in France. The glittering plate and glass of British civilization were notably lacking; in their place were the one black-handled knife and fork that must be conserved on a knife-rest for use with every course, served on an inconsistently lavish succession of plates. But what a menu that unpretentious little ship offered to its one passenger! There, on that tiny deck, with the strong, steady monsoon almost blowing the food off the table, the old black-garbed 'boy' presented (and insisted on my eating), first, potato-salad and savoury sausage by way of hors-d'œuvre; then a fried egg sizzling in its pan; delicious leeks *au jus*; grilled fillet of steak and fried potatoes; cheese, fruit, and excellent coffee; the whole washed down with as much good red wine as I cared to drink. No detail was lacking, even to the lump of ice in my wineglass—and an egg-cup full of toothpicks! It was a meal that left you in no doubt as to the ship's nationality; from the motor-boat in Singapore harbour I had stepped straight into France; not the France of the Rue de Rivoli, or even of the Messagéries Maritimes, perhaps . . . but of those humbler—and to me, pleasanter—rendezvous that every Parisian or Marseillais knows so well. And by way of contrast, imagination boggled painfully at the attempt to imagine the food that might be set before one on a British ship of the same humble class. It was an interesting example of the characteristic French pre-occupation with the joys of the table, that the shabby little old ship should employ a first-rate Tonkinese chef from one of the big Saigon restaurants; and that this important functionary's kitchen should be given the place of honour amidships, on deck, where in a ship of any other nationality, there would probably have been a lounge for lazy passengers.

I only saw the 'Commandant' once while we were at sea. On the second day out, he descended the companion from his deck to mine, very neat in spotless white silk pyjamas, black beret, black silk socks, and patent-leather slippers—and a pencil behind one ear, which the strong wind caught and blew rolling along the deck. He retrieved

all over, with outstretched hand. '*Pas malade, Madame? Tant mieux!*' and vanished again about his business.

Not all my meals were served on deck. Sometimes the 'boy' would decide that I should have them in the saloon below; and then, obeying some obscure, unwritten law of decorum all his own, he laid my solitary place at one extreme end of the very long table, and that of the Chief (and only) Engineer at the other, so that to carry on a conversation above the creakings and groanings and all the other noises of the old ship, we should have been the better of a couple of megaphones. A mighty trencherman was the Engineer; he assured me that he had put on forty kilos in eleven months: and, watching him at mealtimes, I didn't wonder. '*Qu'est-ce-que vous voulez?*' he would roar, slapping his noble stomach. '*Manger, boire de la bonne bière, dormir—'puis boire, dormir, manger—il faudra ramasser des grosses pierres toute la journée pour ne pas s'engraisser!*' . . . and went on to recall memories, as he munched, of the Suez Canal in 1916, 'when the Gods fought on our side, and the wind from the desert blew sand in the Turks' faces, and blinded them' . . . until reminiscence was drowned in another deep draught of beer.

On this leisurely trip we saw far more of Puolo Condor than on the previous one, for we spent the best part of a day there at anchor, sheltered by a bay from the heavy swell outside. Times had changed since we were here last; and under the altered régime of a new Governor, the former contingent of warders' wives no longer swarmed aboard to exchange gossip with the outside world. The police boarded us first; stayed awhile, and departed again loaded with an odd mixture of spoil which included a ham dangling from a string, bags and baskets of provisions, and many packets of matches: about whose landing there are no complications, for Puolo Condor is one of those rare and happy places where there are no duties or Customs formalities.

Then came the passengers. There was an army captain bound for leave in France; a tall Indian warder in uniform, with his Indian wife, graceful and picturesque in her green and gold sari, and their four little girls, all dressed exactly

alike in ugly European pink silk frocks and sun-helmets: the latter quite superfluous, one would have thought, for the little lasses' skins were nearer black than brown, and the sun could scarcely harm them! I was sitting idly watching the proceedings from the hatch, when without warning the four little girls, in order of age, all walked across the deck, and very gravely shook me by the hand. Evidently they had been well schooled in manners, and though their skins might be dark, they would never be found wanting when it came to the truly French passion for hand-shaking! They spoke French, too, with a deadly correctness that said much for the island school; and we kept up a colourless conversation, until with what I hope was a politeness equal to their own, I managed to excuse myself and withdraw.

A thin, active French-Annamite padre, wearing a long black soutane, and almost eclipsed by his big topee—a charming little man with an extraordinarily sweet smile—was another of our new passengers; and two jolly school-boys: the Governor's son and a school friend: returning to school in Saigon after their holidays on the island. For the rest, we took, as before, some native convicts, due to be released on arrival at Saigon; and a number of soldiers going on leave, wearing queer conical khaki hats with brass tops to match their khaki drill uniforms, who camped for the night on each side of the deck, in convenient proximity to the kitchen.

The Governor's charming wife, who came aboard with her husband to see the two boys off, was as chic in her dainty summer frock as any Parisienne. Yet Time must surely stand still in Puolo Condor; for her son was a confirmed 'Yo-Yo' addict—and 'Yo-Yo' had died a painless death in Europe at least three years before! Though in justice to the lad, I must confess that he confided to me shyly (after a masterly exposition of 'taking the dog for a walk') that he knew the game was no longer really *à la mode*. And that modern influences had not passed them by was proven by the absorbed interest with which both boys hung on the words of the young army captain, when that fever-worn, emaciated officer emerged unshaven from his cabin, and delivered a homily on everything connected

with aviation, and the perils and pitfalls of army examinations, which lasted all the way from Cape St. Jacques to Saigon.

Most of the little ship's personnel seemed to have relations awaiting them when we arrived; and as our deck's level was but slightly above that of the wharf, greetings were intimate and easy. Cries of '*Voilà ton oncle!*' '*Bonjour, Papa!*' '*Allo, mon vieux!*' passed cheerily to and fro, and reunited relatives shook hands fervently through the rail the moment we came within shaking distance. Then, of course, the Police came on board—in the person of a fat, jolly little 'Chief', and his attendant minions; and the Commandant (now metamorphosed in correct tropical uniform) formally introduced me as the distinguished (?) and only foreign passenger. Whereupon we all bowed profoundly, shook hands, and proceeded downstairs to complete the necessary landing formalities. I handed over my passport and immigration papers (which the French Consul in the Straits had assured me were unnecessary; but on which experience had taught me to insist, having proved them no ill store); and was given another long list of intimate questions regarding my parentage and antecedents to fill in—though how the Christian names and religious convictions of my 'Papa et Maman', as the friendly Chef de Police called them, could affect the case, was a mystery to me. This done, it remained only for the Chief to affix the official stamp of the Immigration Office, and 'in one little moment', he assured me, I should be free.

But here a hitch occured. The neat little metal stamp and a bottle of violet ink were ready to his hand—but no pad was to be found! Repeated calls for 'Si'—who, it seemed, was the official holder of the pad—brought no response; doubtless he was embracing some relative or other in the engine-room. The Chief of Police mopped his streaming brow. He himself, he explained, would not dream of detaining me, but I might have all sorts of trouble later on, if he let me go ashore without this Open Sesame.

There was no sign of either 'Si', or the pad, and the Chief seemed singularly lacking in initiative; so, though I was much too entertained to be in any hurry, I offered

some modest improvisations. Borrowing a sheet of blotting-paper from the ship's 'writer', who was one of the interested party round the table, I soaked it with the violet ink, and pressed the stamp on it; but it was not a success; '*Ça mange tout*' ('it eats it all'), said the Chief of Police sadly, shaking his head, as though aghast at the blotting-paper's greed—and called again, forlornly, for 'Si'. Then I had another brain-wave, and dabbed ink direct from the cork on to the sacred stamp of the Government Immigration Office. This time it worked—more or less. The Chief watched my experiments (on the backs of the ship's bills of lading) with obvious delight. '*Ça va!*' he cried excitedly; and seizing the stamp, he marked my passport—quite illegibly, filling in the gaps by hand; then handed me the precious document with a bow, a flourish, a handshake, and a little speech of welcome. Thus I came, for the second time, into Indo-China.

There was only one sign of life on the empty wharves as the 'pousse' trotted me along them: a tricycle, on which a 'sirop' stall had been ingeniously rigged up, appeared round a corner; and as it approached our ship, its rider, a Chinese woman in black coat and trousers, with a baby strapped on her back, dismounted and stood looking round for customers.

A new hotel, modest in price, but offering in return the most admirable 'confort moderne' I have yet encountered in many years in the East, had been built close to the wharf since my last visit; and thither, on the wise recommendation of a director of the shipping company met on board during the morning's activities, I thankfully repaired. But other changes less heartening had taken place also in Saigon in the interval. The Rue Catinat, once so busy and so gay, was now almost deserted; whole rows of shops —whole blocks of buildings—stood empty and shuttered. The street seemed strangely silent. Sometimes there was not a sound; not a single vehicle in the roadway, and only a few foot-passengers passing up and down upon the pavement. An odd sense of unreality pervaded the place. Could this possibly be the gay Saigon—the Eastern Paris—

was THIS the answer to the riddle of Angkor? Had there been after all no dramatic defeat? No wholesale slaughter and annihilation, to account for the great city's abandonment to the jungle? Might it not have been simply some unrecorded 'financial depression' that drained wealth and commerce and inhabitants away from it, little by little, until, when 'recovery' came at last, there was no one left to enjoy it? We shall never know. But one thing is certain. If Saigon should follow the example of Angkor, and become an abandoned city (which may the Gods forbid, for it is a most pleasant and hospitable place!), no ruins will remain to mystify the archæologists of future ages. It is a delightful city, as I have said. But its buildings were never designed to endure for a thousand years.

This time I elected to go the whole way to Cambodia by road. And when, on going to book my seat, I expressed rather satirical doubts as to my chances of occupying it, the clerk smiled reassuringly. 'That was many years ago,' he said with a shrug. 'To-day one has suppressed all that; the front seats are reserved for Europeans.' And so, indeed, it proved. This time the journey was a very different story. Soon after four o'clock next morning a private car called for me at the hotel, and drove me through the empty streets to the big courtyard behind the post-office; where, one after the other, the big post 'buses appeared, loaded the roomy lockers on their roofs with mail-bags, and vanished again into the darkness for their various destinations. At last came the 'bus for Phnom Penh; and in I climbed, with one other European passenger, a stout commercial traveller, who occupied the whole of one front seat, while I had the other.

We set off through dark streets; so strangely like those of a French town, with the trees planted at regular intervals along the edge of the pavements, that had it not been for the queer, unmistakable Eastern smells that reached one's nostrils now and then, it would have been easy to fancy oneself in the outskirts of Marseilles. And then suddenly we were clear of the town, on a grass-edged

bullock-carts, lighted only by a lantern swinging from the axle, loomed up through the mist, with human figures looking like shapeless bundles a-top of the load, and were swallowed up again almost as soon as they were sighted.

Gradually the mist grew whiter, as the light strengthened, and finally dispersed altogether, as the sun rose, drawing aside the veil that had hidden the panorama through which we were passing. This southern part of the peninsula is rich in rubber, and many plantations vary the monotony of the rice-landscape: which is also broken here and there by patches of tobacco, each with its well, and long bamboo lever to lift water. Open grass-land, not unlike an English common, is another feature of the scenery in this region, and on them are often to be seen groups of Annamite graves marked with blocks of red laterite.

It so happened that our journey synchronized with that of the swallows, enormous numbers of which were congregated all along the road, resting in readiness for the next stage of their migration. For many miles, until we had travelled far from the coast, they sat perched in countless thousands on the telegraph wires. Further on, an occasional big black wagtail watched us pass from the same lofty perch; and once across the Mékong, brilliant blue kingfishers were common.

Rice was being reaped or threshed in many fields. It is cut by hand, and also hand-threshed in the southern part of the Peninsula; further north, in Cambodia, where buffaloes are more abundant, the grain is trodden out by the great hooves of these beasts in the fields, where it is afterwards collected on grass mats, bagged on the spot, and dumped by the roadside to await transport to the mills. The straw is stacked, and, as in all Eastern countries, serves a thousand useful purposes.

You are in no doubt as to when you have crossed the boundary of Cambodia, for the roof-ends of every temple and monastery (and there are many) are turned up with the picturesque snake-heads which are the modern architectural version of the Naga of the ancient Khmers. It is

border, should have adopted that very practical and economic means of transport, the 'pousse-bicyclette'—in other words, the push-bike trailer—is not so obvious. But whatever the reason, they have taken it to their hearts with a vengeance; near to towns or villages you meet them by the score. The trailers, which have a front and back seat, and are very much like an old-fashioned 'landau' in miniature, are usually full to overflowing; sometimes with a whole native family, father, mother, and assorted children, or with four fat bonzes sitting at their ease in their canary-coloured robes, a huge umbrella shading their shaven heads, while the brave bicyclist pedals gallantly along, the sweat soaking his flapping jacket (for, curiously enough, you seldom see him without one) and trickling down his shapely bare calves—all for a few paltry cents. He is usually quite cheerful; and one can only suppose he is philosophically grateful for small mercies. How much worse his lot would be, for instance, if the surface of his native land were not for the most part as flat as a board!

These bicycle trailers have only recently been introduced, and have done much to solve the transport problem for the visitor to Cambodia, as well as for the natives. Building them has become a popular village industry, and the decoration of them, even more so. To appreciate them properly you must approach them from behind, for the back is the only part that offers a canvas large enough for these extremely primitive artists. Bizarre pictures of fishes, tigers, rural scenes in amazing perspective, Angkor Wats, and wandering lovers—all drawn and coloured as ingenuously as a child of six might do it—add greatly to the diversions of the road; but they certainly cannot be cited as proof of their authors' descent from the artists of Angkor!

Cambodia appears also to have a monopoly of the pneumatic-tyred pony-carts recently introduced into this part of the world. And these too, laden with enormous loads of goods and passengers, are often met with along the road.

The post 'bus stopped at Soaering, a picturesque little town, to allow the European passengers to drink a cup of

territory for the delectation of travellers; and soon after mid-day we passed through the pleasant suburbs of Phnom Penh, and finally came to a standstill in the courtyard of the post office, where a crowd of rickshaw-coolies wrangled amiably for the privilege of transporting my suit-case the 50 yards or so across the square to the hotel.

It was very evident, when the Angkor motor 'bus appeared again a day or two later, that, as the clerk in the booking-office had told me, 'one had suppressed' the manners and customs of other days. No longer as on that earlier occasion did the groaning vehicle exude natives and their odorous impedimenta, as it were, at every pore. When it arrived it was empty; and the sprinkling of passengers that awaited it outside the 'Postes', and those that we picked up here and there along the road, never sufficed to do more than fill the back seats comfortably. As the one and only white passenger, I had mine to myself; so that the once adventurous journey to Angkor was performed far more comfortably than in a private car, and for no more than it would have cost in petrol. Instead of the day-long purgatory of the last trip, this one afforded the very best of conditions to watch the panorama of country life through which we passed; and I felt at peace with all the world—even my fellow-passengers! Among them, this time, the Cambodian Army was represented by one solitary soldier, who seemed obsessed by the necessity never to let his rifle out of his hands for a moment. From time to time we picked up a yellow-robed bonze; or a young man in pseudo-western dress, and felt hat, or one of those peculiar pinkish cloth caps beloved of the provincial French. One of them wore a thick 'jazz' pull-over, all through the blazing day—no doubt one must be chic, even on a motor 'bus in Cambodia; and they all showed mouthfuls of gold teeth when they smiled. One outclassed all the others by sporting a front tooth of red enamel in a golden rim—a tooth that King Yacovarman himself in all his glory could scarcely have bettered.

Needless to say there was a 'chauffeur's assistant', as on every 'bus or hire-car in the East; and he wore a once-white

shiny black Chinese trousers, gold teeth, very dark glasses, and an ornate gold wrist-watch on a wide bracelet. His feet were bare, and his slender brown hands were garnished with black-rimmed nails and a glittering 'diamond' ring on the index finger. But all this did not prevent him from being just as accomplished an acrobat as his prototype of my last journey along this road; and the eyes behind those dark glasses were the pleasantest and friendliest imaginable.

Looking over my shoulder as the back seats filled up, I could see an odd assortment of slumbering dandies, with sun glasses slipping off pock-marked noses, mouths open to reveal golden teeth, and heads rolling friendliwise on each other's shoulders. Behind them again were some demure, slim little damsels dressed in the inevitable black, with scarves over their heads tied tightly under their chins, who delightedly exchanged smiles and signs with me, in not too respectful reference to the sprawling sleepers spread out between us.

Arrived at Kompong Thom, again a long and seductive menu was set out for my sole enjoyment; and while I did it full justice, the manager—an elderly Englishman who has been so long in the colony that he has all but forgotten his own language—further regaled me at his own suggestion with soulful renderings of 'Thora' and other items of the same period, on the piano. After lunch I was introduced to the hotel pet: a fine tigress, five years old, which licked our hands and purred ecstatically when we scratched her behind the ears, and altogether displayed a more amiable temperament than the average domestic cat—though I am bound to say that tickling a full-grown tigress is a diversion for which I have no real enthusiasm. I learned that the intelligent animal had been engaged by Gloria Swanston to appear in a jungle film, 'shot' in the neighbourhood; but 'Kiki' had blandly refused to behave like a dangerous wild beast, or to give the hero any opportunities for the display of heroism. She lay purring, blinking sleepily at the performance, until in desperation they had let off crackers to rouse her to action. The only effect, however,

It is one of the compensations of travelling among a people of whose language you are almost ignorant, that surprises may greet you at any moment. And even 'Kiki' could not have been more startled at the crackers, than I was when a few hours later, after discharging the mail-bags at the well-remembered post office at Siem Réap, we turned off the shady riverside avenue into a wide, brand-new road; and I saw ahead, blindingly white in the hot sunshine, a huge modern concrete hotel that would have looked more at home at Nice or Monte Carlo. Almost stunned by the apparition, I was nevertheless pouring out blessings on those concerned, that at least it was well out of sight of Angkor, awaiting me deep in the forest some miles away—when I realized that the driver was inviting me to descend and enter this magnificent hostelry. This, however, I had no desire to do. I was bound for the quiet bungalow that hides itself so modestly among the trees beside the moat that it cannot offend the prejudices of even the most sentimental pilgrim.

But the driver shook his head. This was the hotel. All visitors to Angkor stayed here. . . . The Bungalow? It was closed—no one ever went there now . . . and meanwhile my suit-case was lifted from the roof, and deposited with a gesture of finality on the ground.

My heart sank within me like lead. Was this the end of my long-projected pilgrimage? To stop five miles short of my objective, in a barrack that looked like a stray from the Riviera? By the grace of the Gods of Angkor—I thought not! . . . and entered the imposing portico in search of the manager.

My memories of that interview are rather hazy. With my whole mind set on the sight of the lovely lotus towers of the Great Wat within the next few minutes, this silly setback had the unreality of a sudden awakening from deep sleep and dreams. A stout Frenchman burbled of 'confort moderne' and 'cuisine du premier ordre', and waved a hand to indicate earthworks that looked like recent archæological excavations, but which he said were in preparation for 'le golf'. . . . It all left me perfectly cold. I

THE ROYAL STAIRCASE

Guarded by lions and Nagas, and flanked by figures with arms upraised to support the now-vanished buildings above. It led to the Palace of the Kings of Angkor

hotel. I was bound for Angkor. And if the Bungalow's doors were closed to me, then I would seek the shelter of the great temple itself, buying food from the natives. . . .

Apparently he was convinced. I felt rather like a sleep-walker, and it may be that I looked like one, or that he thought me mad, and an undesirable inmate for the 'Grand Hotel'. At all events, quite suddenly he capitulated. The Bungalow was closed, but an old 'boy' was still in charge of it. He could open a room for me, and provide me with coffee and bread and bananas; and when I felt in need of a 'repast', I could get a 'pousse-bicyclette' in the native village near the Wat, to bring me to Siem Réap. So it was arranged. The Gods were on my side. A group of gaily decorated 'pousses' were standing outside, their riders sleeping in the trailers. I wakened one whose little carriage bore a striking design of snakes and monkeys, stepped in, and set off on the last stage of my journey.

It was my first experience of the mode of transport that was soon to become so familiar, and it is hard to imagine one better suited to the needs of the pilgrim. It is far pleasanter than any motor car, for it is silent—or nearly so; it is comfortable (for the passenger, at least!), swift enough to be pleasant, yet not so swift as to prevent you from observing everything that you wish, at your ease. I liked it that first day; and learned to like it better still in the weeks that followed, as I realized how easy it made the explorations that had been so difficult before.

Those last few miles of the road to Angkor wind through the forest, following the old bullock-cart track. There are a few small clearings planted with rice, and a pool or two with heron grouped about them. But on the whole it varies little, and is fairly typical of the forest that has grown up round the ruins of the ancient capital and its temples since the days when they were abandoned. And as the 'pousse' took me swiftly and silently through it, the mental vision of what lay so short a way ahead grew more and more distinct. There flashed into my mind the remark of an apparently matter-of-fact Saigon business man, who had said: 'What can it be, this hold that Angkor takes of one? . . . Why, when I am talking to a client, should I see it

there behind him? . . . I can never forget it.' I know no more than he did. But when at last the forest opened out ahead, and I saw those marvellous towers again, after years that to me had been full to overflowing with happenings and anxieties very far removed from the mystical wonder-land of Angkor, they seemed scarcely more tangible than the vision of them that had dwelt with me for so long. I felt that I too had never been able to forget it, or cease to see it. Always it had been there in the background, tempting, hallucinating—until it had drawn me back to it in the flesh as it had never failed to transport me in the spirit.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CAMBODIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS

There was certainly no doubt about the bungalow being closed. The long, sprawling building seemed completely deserted, as though a blight had fallen upon it, and it had joined the great company of its noble forbears, abandoned for ever to the jungle. Unlike them, however, it was not yet in ruins; and as I had been told—albeit grudgingly—that I should find a 'boy' in charge, I walked along each arm of the silent place, up and down the long rows of tightly shuttered doors and windows, in search of him. I sought him in the kitchen, which for some reason was open, and where the big range flanked by many tiers of shelves, stood empty, innocent of crockery, pots, or pans. I peered through a window into the dining-room, where chairs and tables were stacked in depressing, orderly ranks; but not a sign of life or occupation could I find. And I began to wonder whether after all I should be obliged to seek the hospitality of the great temple that now lay spread out before me across the wide moat, in the mellow splendour of the westering sun, calling insistently to me to come and renew its acquaintance.

The 'pousse'-coolie, the only living creature within sight, was not helpful. Every time I glanced in his direction across the rough grass that serves the Bungalow as a garden, he was gazing at me curiously, hoping no doubt that failing to get in, I should pay him another few cents to take me back to Siem Réap. But he was doomed to disappointment. For at last, as I fossicked and called among the out-buildings at the back, there appeared, rubbing his eyes sleepily, a stout old Tonkinese, arrayed in the most prodigally voluminous suit of white pyjamas I have ever seen. He showed no sign of either surprise, annoyance or pleasure when I said that I wanted a room; but answered in quite passable French; and then, walking majestically

selected a door apparently at random from among the long uniform rows, unlocked it, and ushered me into a room which in five minutes he had made comfortably ready for occupation.

Here, then, was home. The gods had smiled again. I took possession; paid off the disappointed 'pousse'; and was free at last to make my way across the grass, up the wide, lion-guarded steps, and on over the hot, uneven stones of the outer causeway to the tremendous façade; to hurry through the dark entrance out into the late afternoon glow again, along the inner causeway between the two sacred tanks where bonzes were bathing, their discarded yellow robes making bright splashes of colour on the ground (exactly as I had seen them there years before)...and so at last into the quiet, well-remembered, grass-grown courtyard, just in time to watch the last of the sunshine slipping away from the familiar, lovely roofs and towers, before the tantalizing darkness swallowed them up, and sent me groping back to test the doubtful possibilities of the empty bungalow.

They proved better than might have been expected. Far better in their way than the dubious hospitality of my previous visit, when the place had been fully equipped for visitors. For there now appeared at my call the portly form of the old 'boy': who nodded, vanished, and reappeared soon after, with tea in a huge German-silver pot, bread, butter, and bananas—his one idea of a meal, varied only at will, by coffee, as I was soon to learn. But what more, after all, could the appetite of happy pilgrim desire?

Even the soberest of savants have admitted to some disturbance of the emotions at their first sight of Angkor Wat, or on seeing it again after long absence. So perhaps it was scarcely surprising if the drowsy sunset hour that I (who am no savant) had spent among its lonely splendours, as the climax to a long, exciting day: seeing again with my own eyes all the beauty that for so long I had seen only in memory—had produced the strangest tangle of sensations, made up of exhilaration, nervousness and Heaven only knows what else; a state of mind in which I felt that

I would have greeted the ghosts of Yacovarman or Tchou Ta-Kuan with as complete equanimity as the old 'boy', if either of them had put in an appearance.

Of the 'boy's' company, at all events, there appeared to be no further prospect. He had vanished some time ago with his tray, down a long passage in the direction of the back regions, where he no doubt had quarters in some distant wing; having first very solemnly confided that his name was 'Hoa', and turning on a light in the verandah just outside my room 'in case I should be nervous'.

For some reason or other, despite my rather strung-up mood, I was not nervous in the least. Though I easily might have been; for the Bungalow was almost as eerie a place in its way as the Wat: with its long verandahs leading off into the darkness, past the endless rows of tightly closed doors and windows hiding empty bedrooms, all exact facsimiles of mine.

Outside all was very still: so still that now and then from far away—probably from the Wat itself—I could hear very faintly a 'tokek' lizard slowly counting to himself in the darkness. Through my wide-open shutters I could see the stars shining above the trees. And so I drifted off to sleep, hugging to myself the happy knowledge that the Great Wat too was sleeping only half a mile away, and that when I woke it would be to see the dawn breaking behind its perfect towers.

I was destined to see that dawn; but my awakening was not to be quite according to my anticipations. I do not know how long I had been asleep, when, from a confused dream of courtyards and colonnades in which there echoed unceasingly the 'tap, tap' of sculptors' chisels—a sound I have often heard in imagination as I wandered along the long galleries of the bas-reliefs—I half woke: to hear the monotonous tapping still going on. But, too drowsy to do more than wonder vaguely how that could be, I was soon asleep again.

This time, I do not think I could have slept for long. I awoke to full realization that the sound I had heard was

Under the circumstances you will admit that it was a little startling. But anything—and the more absurd, the more probable it is—can happen in the East. Quite possibly it was 'Hoa', who had forgotten to ask at what time I wanted my morning tea! So, knowing the swinging screen-doors and open shutters to be no protection in any case, I called out to ask the untimely intruder his business.

It was when there came no answer, though the tapping continued, that my nerves really began to jump. I was broad awake now; and I sat up, every muscle tense, as that soft, persistent, irregular tap-tap went on and on; and there grew upon me every moment the impression of some sinister presence. Worst of all, it seemed to be approaching nearer and nearer; it was no longer outside the door, though it still tapped; it was in the room with me; and I could feel the sweat trickling over my skin as I sat hunched up into the smallest possible compass I could contrive, with my arms round my knees, in the very middle of the big bed, as far as possible inside the flimsy shelter of the mosquito-net, which gave me an absurd, irrational sense of protection.

I am afraid it must be confessed that by this time I was badly scared. I dared not switch on the electric torch that is my regular bed-fellow (for the detection of any stray mosquito that may find its way inside the net) for fear of making myself visible to whatever it was that lurked in the darkness; nor had I the courage to leave the ridiculous sanctuary of the mosquito-net, lest worse befall me; and I must have sat there in a kind of petrified funk for a long time, trying in vain to think of some reasonable explanation that would enable me to laugh at my fears: or at worst, tell me what it was that I was afraid of.

Bats were my first thought; but there was no hope in that direction. The last thing any self-respecting bat thinks of doing is to tap; it is their weird ability to avoid all obstacles in the darkness, and their almost soundless flutter, that makes them so uncanny. Snakes?.. Tiger?... Panther?... No. Tapping would not be a foible of any of them. Nor could I feel, even now, that it was the ghosts

innocent slumbers. Nevertheless, reasoned I never so sagely, there was no denying that my sensations were most unpleasant. The menace, whatever it was, came closer. I could not see, but I felt sure that something had gently shaken the net . . . and then, without warning, there came a light tap on my cheek . . . and for one split second my heart seemed to stop.

This was sheer horror. Inside the walls of my absurd hiding-place I had fancied there was safety; but its sanctuary once violated, my one thought was to escape. And then, even as I thought, there rose from the head of the bed, close to my ear, the shrillest, most piercing shriek I had ever heard: rising higher and higher, louder and louder, till I thought my drums must crack; and I plunged my fingers into my ears in a vain attempt to keep it out; it was exactly like being trapped in a railway tunnel with a whistle that will not stop. On and on went the deafening, strident clamour, driving before it every last vestige of rational thought that remained to me; I seemed to be caught up in the coil of its whirring, maddening vibrations . . . when another faint buffet in the face gave me the spur I needed to drive me to action. I fumbled for the torch, careless now of everything except the urgent necessity to get outside—somewhere, anywhere, away from the Unseen that was close beside me, inside my trusted holy of holies, the net.

I switched the torch on . . . took one horrified glance . . . and then, clutching, pulling, tearing at the net that had now become a cage and an abode of terror . . . got somehow to the door; felt everywhere except in the right place for its fastening . . . and at last, barefoot and in my night-gear, was outside under the stars in the silence of the night—for that awful sound had ceased as suddenly as it had started.

The coarse grass cut my feet, but I cared little for that. My one idea was to get out of reach of that horrible room. And it was not until I found myself on the smooth, sun-warmed sandstone slabs that crown the top of the moat wall, that I felt really safe. Below me was the dark water:

a blacker mass against the starlit sky. I could breathe normally again; I was in the open; and if marauders came my way I should at least have warning of their coming.

Not all the ghosts that ever walked could have been quite so revolting as the living visitation that had been revealed when I switched on the light under the canopy of mosquito-curtains. Or at all events none could have given a sleeper a more unpleasant awakening. A mass of brownish, fleshy, creeping bodies covered the net inside and out; they crawled, with an occasional sluggish hop, over the floor, the table and chairs, and over my clothes hanging on the pegs. It was a Cambodian edition of the Biblical plague of 'grasshoppers innumerable'—attracted, no doubt, by the light that the old 'boy' had so considerately left burning outside my door 'in case I should be nervous!' It was the only light for miles around; for those in the monastery would have been extinguished hours ago. The tapping on my door and shutters was accounted for, by the senseless, frustrated hops of the wretched creatures, drawn by some obscure instinct to congregate in the dark shelter behind the light, through the only openings in the long, blank, shuttered wall.

Except that a stone slab makes a somewhat unsympathetic bed, there is no great hardship in spending the night—or part of it—beside the moat at Angkor Wat. There seemed even something rather appropriate in such a vigil on the first night of my return; and at all events there was no fear that I should miss seeing the sunrise. An hour or two must have passed when, though it was still quite dark, I heard the soft padding of bare feet along the dusty road, and knew that the native village must be astir, and dawn could not be far behind. Soon the long wall on the far side of the moat began to take shape, and a pale light in the east very faintly outlined the lofty lotus towers. Daylight would soon be here, and it behoved me, as the one and only European resident, to dress the part rather more conventionally than was now the case. Sooner or later I must face my haunted room again; and, truth to tell,

out there in the cool, clean dawn, whether the whole thing had not been a nightmare.

But as I crossed the verandah to my door, where the light was still burning, I saw ample evidence that I had not been dreaming. The tiled floor was strewn with slowly moving brown shapes, among which one would give a spasmodic hop now and then: and inside the room they were everywhere. The high windows and the openings above and below the doors had given them easy ingress; and my toilet that morning was a very hasty one. I crushed the horrible juicy bodies underfoot on the concrete floor of the bathroom, and found them in every corner; in the basin, in my sponge, under the pillows, in the sleeves of my dressing-gown, in the toes of my shoes, in my hat, and clinging to every garment in the wardrobe. I was even destined to find one miles away and hours later at midday, snugly tucked into my spectacle-case, when I took the glasses out in order to focus the camera.

I saw no necessity to confess my shameful rout to Hoa, when he arrived soon after daylight with my tea. His French was limited, and my Cambodian more so; and after all, what was there to be said? But though in the whole course of our acquaintance I never saw a smile, or any recognizable expression, on his unchanging countenance, I almost thought, for one fleeting moment, as his glance took in the corpse-strewn scene of the night's adventures, that I saw a faint suggestion that somewhere behind that impassive face, the unfathomable Oriental brain was registering amusement. He said nothing, as he turned to, with his usual efficiency, to clean the Augean stable: except to murmur the cryptic remark that 'the insects had increased since the fires were lighted'—which conveyed nothing to me at the time.

It's an ill wind that blows no one any good; and there were some who rejoiced as a result of my nocturnal adventure. My 'ghosts' were swept up in pailsful, and were carried off in high glee by some poor women from the neighbouring hamlet—whether to feed the scraggy, long-legged fowls that here, as elsewhere in the East, scratch

or to add a tasty relish to the scanty family ration of rice, I dared not inquire. Though they would at least be more succulent than the red ants which the great poverty of these humble people sometimes drives them to add to their menu.

Hoa's odd reference to the lighting of fires occurred to me several times during the day that followed my too-adventurous night; but when I questioned him he only waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the Wat, saying something about 'fires over there'. Could he possibly, I wondered, have meant the strange phenomenon that followed the sunset every evening at the Wat, as regularly, and as certainly to be counted upon, as the darkness? . . . And then I suddenly remembered that on the previous evening, though I had been in the great temple at sundown, I had seen nothing of that curious sight that I had watched nightly during my stay at Angkor years before: a happening that took place punctually to the minute, day after day, and week after week—and which native tradition said had done so century after century, ever since Angkor was deserted.

No one had told me what to expect as I came down from the upper galleries of the Wat through the courtyards where the shadows were gathering, on that long-age afternoon of the very first day I had ever spent in these regions. The sun, a blazing orange ball in the cloudless heavens, was dropping into the west; and I sat on the broad, sun-warmed stone of the Naga balustrade to watch it disappear behind the outer façade, which already was a sharply outlined purple silhouette against the glowing evening sky. The sun vanished; the warmth and brilliance that a moment before had coloured the scene, faded and died; one tall palm in the foreground, till then a vivid green patch among the surrounding grey buildings, was suddenly black as a pen and ink drawing. The façade, too, turned black, and seemed to recede farther and farther into the distance; so I turned my back upon the melancholy sight, to look instead for as long as the light should last, at the immortal beauty of the western face of the temple itself.

THE "HALL MARK" OF KHMER ARCHITECTURE

Naga, the seven-headed serpent and mythical founder of the Cambodian race. His head adorns every roof, balustrade, and terrace

THE OUTERMOST POINT OF ANGKOR WAT

One of the lions guarding the entrance to the causeway across the moat. The centre of the temple—marked by the highest of the pointed towers seen in the background—is half a mile away

its incomparable perfection, as the light faded and the details grew less and less distinct, as though shrouded with a veil. And then, with a jerk, I was wide awake, and a stab of horrified astonishment ran through me. I rubbed my eyes—unable to believe what I saw; for it seemed to my excited imagination that 'thin little wisps of smoke were rising from each of the towers, curling up in faint dark threads against the pale sky. Absurd! Utterly impossible! How could the Wat be on fire?—a vast building of solid stone, from which all but a few fragments of timber have long disappeared? And yet—there, incontestably, was smoke; and where there is smoke there must surely be fire. I wanted to call somebody—do something; but what to do?—whom to call? There are no fire-brigades in these parts; and even if there were, all the fire-engines in London Town would make but a sorry show against the walls of Angkor Wat!

I sat watching in a kind of fascinated stupor, as the smoke-wisps thickened and darkened, and poured out faster and faster from the tip of every tower. Swirling above them, ever more densely, higher and higher the smoke-wreaths rose; thicker and thicker, till they all met and melted together in one opaque dark cloud; whirling and eddying round and round, forming at last into a tall black column like a waterspout. It was all a matter of minutes; perhaps only of seconds; but I seemed to have been staring, foolishly bewildered, for hours—when suddenly the dark column broke and fell, to spread out again into an immense black pall that hung for a moment or two above the towers; and then, as though driven by some mighty hurricane, came racing westward far overhead. Smoke? . . . Even my confused senses realized by now that it was something other than that: for never was there smoke that behaved quite so oddly. The dark cloud swirled forward at breathless speed above my head, to the accompaniment of an indescribable, all-pervading, yet volumeless sound, made up of the beating of millions of tiny wings and the twitter of millions of tiny voices; and for the fraction of a second, as I stared straight up into the heart of the racing mass, I could distinguish the movement of the

countless separate living bodies that composed it, as you see the movement of the ants on an ant hill. And then, before I had time to realize it, the sound that had been all about me for a moment of time like a fairies' orchestra, had died away; and the cloud, already little bigger than a man's hand, was vanishing into the west, in the track of the departed sun.

A very ordinary, everyday phenomenon, this nightly foray of the bats, the Superior Person will probably remark. Everybody knows that bats sleep all day, and go a-hunting by night! And of course the Superior Person will be perfectly right. But the bats of Angkor are a very different story to the stragglers that flit here and there round the ivy-covered tower in an English churchyard. They are a whole population, millions upon millions strong, that has been in undisputed possession of a kingdom for countless generations; and not only that: there is a deep-rooted belief among the Cambodian peasants that those rank-smelling, ugly, verminous little bodies of the 'prechieu', are the restless harbourage of all the souls of the vanished Khmers. And whether or not you choose to believe that the swirling cloud of small living bodies is really a cloud of witnesses, who, if only we possessed the key to their twittering language, could tell us the whole mysterious story of the ruins they inhabit—the nightly departure of the bats from Angkor Wat (and to a rather less degree from the other ruins) was a spectacle well worth watching on its own merits.

I had no interpreter in those days, and it was only by watching the towers on the next and many following evenings, that I discovered the amazing punctuality and exact repetition of the programme of the bats' proceedings. For as long as I remained at Angkor, there was never a single minute's variation in the time when the first smoke-like wisps curled thinly upwards from the top of each tower. At ten minutes past six there was not a sign of them; at eleven minutes past to the tick, the exodus began, and the whole curious series of manœuvres was carried out with

assembling and control of those whirling masses were far too perfect to be haphazard. Obviously it was an organized hunting-expedition; for the line of flight was always exactly the same, and would lead straight to the wide, placid expanse of the Western Baray, where the hum of insects never ceases: a perfect bats' hunting-ground, if ever there was one.

How long these armies of nocturnal raiders spent on their expeditions, no one ever seemed to know. The one thing certain is that they did not stay out all night. It seemed impossible to rise and creep into the Wat so early that their faint sleepy whisperings far overhead did not announce them safely home again, or that the light of your torch would not show you their ripple of movement on the surface of the wall as though a heavy grey curtain had been disturbed by a gust of wind. And as the light grew stronger, and you peered upwards through the long shaft of darkness opening to the sky at the crest of each tower, you would be able to distinguish tier upon tier of tiny grey bodies, hanging there with wings neatly folded, crowded together so closely that not an inch of the walls remained uncovered: to doze the hours away until the moment when, by what magic radio we shall never know, the message was broadcast that awoke them to fall in with the rest of the mighty host in each of the other towers and ceilings and porches, and set off into the sunset for the nightly hunting.

But all this was missing when I last returned to Angkor, and old Hoa's enigmatical remark proved to be the explanation. In vain I watched at sunset for the 'smoke' to rise as of old, confident that the custom of centuries could not have altered in a few years. The sun vanished and the light faded; the birds chattered and quarrelled in the palms; but no black cloud poured out and thickened above the towers; an item in Angkor's daily life had been crossed off the programme.

Patient questioning of the imperturbable Hoa at last disclosed that it was of real fires, not illusory ones, that he

droppings and their foul effluvia long enough. Straw fires had been lighted to smoke out the vast congregation, and now the walls that once were curtained with their myriad tiny wings were covered with a coat of soot instead. I gathered further, that the local natives were very resentful at this drastic eviction, on the score that it had offended the gods of the temple and caused them to send all sorts of pests in token of their displeasure. But I have a suspicion that the true cause of native resentment is to be sought in the loss of the guano-supply provided by the bat-droppings, which it had been the custom from time immemorial to collect and use as fertilizer for their tobacco-crops—despite the remarks of Tchou Ta-Kuan!

The dark corners of the Wat are certainly cleaner places than they used to be, now that the floors are scraped, and you no longer walk on deep carpets of grey guano; and the hot, stuffy, indescribably characteristic smell of tropic bat-haunts is many degrees less overpowering. On general principles there can be nothing but praise for so admirable a piece of spring-cleaning; but on the other hand there may be something in the native point of view. And personally, if my nocturnal experience was a result of clearing the bats out of their ancient haunts—then I only hope enough still survive to repopulate them!

Well-meaning authority might censor the bats as an evening entertainment, but it had taken no steps, happily, to turn off the moonlight. So, as the moon waxed bigger and bigger, I made up my mind to visit the ghost-city of Angkor Thom by its eerie illumination. Not by car—for what ghost would not fade into the shadows like Eurydice in the glare of electric headlights?—but in my usual unobtrusive chariot, the 'pousse', so much more harmonious with these silent solitudes. Hitherto I had always left the city at dusk: just late enough, sometimes, to set my faithful pousse-coolie pedalling more vigorously than usual in his haste to get clear of the walls ahead of the deepening shadows. But as for moonlight . . . that might be another story. It was quite on the cards that I should be reduced to walking the two and a half miles each way

GIANT-GUARDED CAUSEWAYS

Leading into the city of Angkor Thom: with "fifty-four genii in stone on each side, gigantic and terrible," as described by the Chinese traveller Tchou Ta-Kuan in 1296

which exercise, as age creeps on, I lack enthusiasm!) Besides, to be quite candid, I should not be at all averse to human company in a city full of disembodied spirits. The problem was to find a native bicyclist whose desire for cents was greater than his fear of ghosts; but I felt sure that some of the sceptical younger generation that scoffs at the childish beliefs of its elders were surely to be found; if not in the adjacent village, then in newly-sophisticated Siem Réap.

I put the case before Hoa, that unfailing oracle, who considered it gravely, as was his way. Yes: he would find someone; they were mere savages, these natives (thus Hoa, native of Tonking!) and very superstitious; but ... there was always a way....

I never inquired what that 'way' might be; but late that evening Hoa appeared to announce that 'my pousse was waiting'; and there, sure enough, was one of the two or three gallant cyclists who (by some arrangement of their own or Hoa's) shared between them the labours and lengthy slumbers—and the piastres—attendant upon my daily peregrinations. Hoa, as usual, came out to play the interpreter; but on my giving the usual instruction to take me to Angkor Thom and wait for me wherever I should wish, the pousse-boy vigorously shook his head. No; that, translated Hoa, could not be done. The pousse would take me anywhere I liked, so long as there was a road that he could ride on; but if I stopped, and went off among the ruins and left him alone, a tiger would certainly get me. It was quite obvious that this kindly concern was not altogether disinterested; but it was probably common sense, so I agreed, and off we set.

We had not gone far before I learned the solution of one of the little problems over which I had sometimes idly pondered: as to why it never occurred to any of the poussites to stop the deafening rattle made by a sheet of old petrol-tin always fixed between the back of the saddle and the trailer, as a mudguard. I knew now. It was a safeguard for night-riding, against dangers both material and immaterial; designed impartially to frighten away tigers and evil spirits. Ours was surely enough to intimidate

any ghost that ever walked—or tiger either. But my brave knight of the pousse added to the din by tinkling his bell and bursting into song, at every specially dark or frightening corner.

Thus noisily, waking the peaceful forest road from its dreams, we came to the causeway across the moat of Angkor Thom; and I began to be glad that I had not come alone. I remembered the stories I had heard that no native would ever venture past these awfully staring guardians at night—and I did not wonder. Their eyes seemed to roll at us, as we fled rattling, tinkling, past them; but the great god above the gateway, with the moonlight catching one side of its immense face, leaving the other in deep shadow, ignored us completely, gazing into the distance over our heads with a more aloof air than ever. Then we plunged into the black darkness under the great entrance; and the creaks and groans of the unoiled bike echoed eerily with the other music that heralded our approach, as the rider redoubled his efforts to escape this yawning cavern, made more terrible by the slight rise that had to be negotiated over the old gate's foundations. Out in the moonlight again, we raced on, down what was once one of the four main arteries of the city—an Oriental Strand or Piccadilly—where now the straight road runs between walls of forest, with nothing but a few carved stones piled neatly here and there, or a god or so leaning against a tree, to remind you that this forest is not quite as other forests whose roots are not planted among the foundations of a vanished metropolis.

Quite suddenly, straight ahead, the Bayon appears. You may have seen it a hundred times; but the moment when you see it for the first time under the full moon is unforgettable. The whole of the huge mass looms black, like an isolated mountain, and on its long, irregular summit, the faces of a vast company of giants, turned to every point of the compass, stand out in the white beams of the moon; some fully illumined, some in shadow, some with the shape of nose, lips, cheek or chin sharply outlined in black or silver. They may be, as the savants assure us, actually placed with geometrical exactitude; but who

could believe it by moonlight, looking up at that crowd of godlike faces whose number, even yet, is a matter of expert argument? They seem to be perched here, there and anywhere that they could find a place among the mountain crags: a party of benevolent deities amiably discussing the affairs of Olympus by the light of the moon. And I fervently wished that I could reduce the clangour of my caravan, which must surely be disturbing to their august consultations.

We might not stop; but round all four sides of this eerie mountain of the gods we might go—and did—for my pousse obeyed signs as faithfully as an electrically controlled robot 'plane. And then at last, we turned our backs, and left them to it. On we went; on to where the enormous empty 'Place' lay before us like a lake surrounded by fairy palaces. Behind its ruined façade, the Ba Phoun seemed miles away, with the pillars of its long causeway glimmering weirdly white, like a procession of tall figures marching from the lofty sanctuary of the temple, standing out proudly in the white light against its forest setting, sharply outlined as an Egyptian pyramid. A little farther, and there were the elephants, silently pacing, on and on, till they vanished in the haze, tireless and unprotesting at this endless march that goes on century after century, with no rest night or day. Above them were the terraces, where anything might be, so impenetrable were the shadows. And here and there, in the very deepest of the darkness, tiny lights were flickering to and fro . . . fireflies, of course! said common sense . . . but how be sure they were not the ghosts of Palace slaves, carrying torches?

On the other side of the vast 'Place' the line of buildings, untouched by the moonlight, was black and formless; and I wondered whether a tiger or a panther was crouched there, in the doorway where only this morning I had been sitting in the hot sunshine beside a little smiling figure, carved in stone. . . . If only the pousse would stop, and let me go to see! . . . And yet, there, too, the tiny torches kept flashing in and out; so perhaps it was as well not to intrude!

Up and down and round and round we wandered, till

even I had had enough. And if ever bowed shoulders and a pair of fast-pedalling legs expressed relief, that sentiment was registered by those of my faithful pousse-boy, as we left the Bayon behind at last, and fled at breathless, clattering speed down the long straight avenue to the gateway. Before I realized it, I was under my mosquito-net in the dark, quiet Bungalow . . . but only for a moment. The next, I was deep in dreams: wandering again—this time happily in silence—among the shadows of the moonlit ghost-city.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

'CELESTIAL NYMPHS'

I had thought I was alone at the Bungalow. But on the morning after the affair of the grasshoppers, as I sat drinking my coffee on the long verandah that serves as gangway round about the rambling building, an odd little figure suddenly appeared and peeped at me from round the corner leading to the back regions; and then, apparently satisfied that I was harmless, came drifting past me, lightly as a wind-blown leaf. She was a tiny, fairylike girl in a tight, pale-pink bodice and black sampot, and she was followed by another and another: slim little creatures, from scarcely more than babyhood upwards, all with exquisitely modelled wrists and ankles, and dressed in the same queer, tight bodices of different colours, and black sampots.

One by one they flitted shyly past me—nineteen of them—to be followed presently by a number of young men carrying odd-shaped, presumably musical, instruments. They all disappeared in the direction of the dismantled dining-room, whence there presently issued a deafening chorus, which proved to be a rehearsal by a troupe of Cambodian dancers, with appropriate vocal and orchestral accompaniment.

The troupe was quartered somewhere in the scattered back premises of the Bungalow, having been 'retained' by the tourist organization to perform the traditional Cambodian dances whenever enough tourists should appear on the scene to warrant it. These dances are of very ancient origin, and must follow faithfully every gesture and convolution ordained by custom, so that their correct performance necessitates constant practice. Consequently the troupe rehearsed for several hours every morning, thereby providing an ever-popular entertainment for the poor women from the near-by hamlets. A group of them always gathered outside the wide-open windows, all

carrying their babies: these last chastely clad in strings of coins round the neck—and nothing else!

Every Cambodian dancer's fingers must bend backwards in a graceful curve like the outcurling petals of a flower, and the wrist must allow the backs of the fingers to touch the forearm. The elbow must be a sort of universal joint, so that the whole arm may move in rippling curves as though it contained no bones at all; an effect, with arms so slender and shapely, that is very charming. But training must be begun almost in babyhood to attain the required suppleness.

Started thus early, the 'massage' employed, contrary to a rather general belief, is quite painless. The elbows, wrists, and finger-joints are gently pulled apart and pushed backward over and over again, while they are still so soft and immature that the tendons are stretched, and the limbs become what is popularly termed 'double-jointed', long before they are set in the normal position. I have often watched the 'babies' of the troupe practising the treatment on each other amid a great deal of giggling and laughter; and nothing delighted them more than to be called to come and show the comical contortions of which their tiny hands and arms were capable. The idea that it could possibly hurt seemed to cause them a great deal of amusement; and they could never make out why it was that their experiments on my own fingers should be such a hopeless failure.

The dances are entirely foreign to all Western ideas of the ballet, and have a good deal in common with the national dances of the Balinese, Burmese, and several other Eastern races. There is no 'dancing' about them at all in our sense of the word, and they consist of posturing by a number of performers in unison, and of conventional representations of classical fairy-tales. They seem to have been designed on the same principle as that of the wall-carvings: that 'multiplication is decoration'; and their chief beauty is the perfect unison in which the same pose is taken, or movement made, by the whole or part of the troupe—the one feature that they share with the modern Western 'revue'. Though we do not, in the West, extend the

principle, as do the Cambodians, to the repetition, *ad libitum*, *ad nauseam*, of any particularly pleasing evolution; which to Eastern ideas is the only reasonable proceeding, after such infinite pains has gone to achieving perfection. I am afraid it must be admitted that a very little of the Cambodian dances goes a long way; even the curious 'eye-work,' that relieves the monotony in the Balinese performances, is lacking.

The music of the orchestra at first seems entirely formless. Yet even Western ears 'tune in' to it as it becomes more familiar, and the daily rehearsals taught me that, wearying though the everlasting repetitions might be, they were not made at random by any means. The instrumental part, in fact, becomes quite bearable after a time; but I cannot believe that a lifetime of familiarity could ever endear me to the chorus of nasal voices; though in fairness it must be said that they always joined in with perfect precision at the appointed places.

Cambodian music has no written notation. Its strange airs consist of two parts, a question and answer. They are all learned by ear, and apparently to perfection.

Morning after morning, about an hour after sunrise, the procession would file in to the disused dining-room, and orchestra and dancers took their places with at least as much earnestness as the members of a West End production. The musicians adjusted their awkward instruments; the little girls arranged themselves in rows according to size, with great dark eyes fixed on their director; and the 'Néak-con-crap'—meaning, literally, 'the lady who holds the pieces of wood'—an ancient, emaciated dame in rusty black, took her place at the side of them, squatted on the floor.

A Cambodian dance could no more proceed without this important functionary than a 'Prom.' without Sir Henry Wood. And the authoritative smack of her two flat wooden beaters on the ground not only takes the place of a conductor's baton, but is a distinctive feature of the orchestra as well. In that small head, under its thick grey thatch, and wrinkled brown old face with the bright dark eyes, are stored up half a hundred or more tunes, and the dances

and songs that go with them. Her memory of every smallest gesture and each repetition is unerring; and though the 'score' (a little book in which the gestures are illustrated and numbered) lies on the ground in front of her, it seems to be only a matter of form, for she seldom consults it, or turns a page.

All the postures are scientifically designed to present as nearly as possible the idea that it is desired to convey: flying, swimming, or whatever it may be; and every observant spectator of the performances must have noted that there is never a vulgar or suggestive attitude in any of them. The poses are curiously, almost prudishly, chaste—to emphasize the traditional idea that the dancers are not human, but divine.

The brightest jewel of those morning rehearsals was always the last 'turn', when the two babies, aged seven, performed the 'Monkey Dance': a favourite item danced at public performances by two of their maturer colleagues who have attained the ripe age of ten. These lithe little scraps of humanity, with their slim brown limbs and long tapering fingers, as slender and smooth as the loveliest bronzes in the Louvre, and so unbelievably supple to the touch, went through all the complicated movements with the ease and grace of kittens at play, yet with faultless precision. Even the handsprings were so timed that the tiny hands and feet whirled to the ground with not a split second between them.

The orchestral instruments are almost exact reproductions of those that figure so often in the Khmer carvings, and are doubtless the same as those used from very ancient times in the orchestras attached to the court and to all noble households. The whole band resembles in many respects the Javanese and Balinese 'gamelan', especially in its chief instrument, called in Cambodia the 'roneat': a kind of xylophone, with keys made either of metal or of strips of split bamboo. It differs in shape from the Javanese instrument, in which the keys rest on two long, converging bamboos; for the 'roneat' is a picturesque boat-shaped contrivance, in which the keyboard takes the place of the deck. The other instruments most in

use are sets of highly polished gongs arranged round a stand occupying about three-quarters of a circle, tapering at the point, like an overgrown sickle moon; two or three large, barrel-shaped drums, and one or two smaller ones; and two sorts of bamboo flute: one, the 'khloy', played in much the same way as the European instrument; and the 'sralay,' played by drawing in the breath. Performers on either of these are often to be seen laying them down now and then, to refresh themselves with a cigarette; but they never fail to join in at the proper time, though they have nothing but memory to guide them through the maze of apparently indistinguishable movements: A kind of cymbals, called 'chung chap', completes the orchestra on ordinary occasions; but many other instruments are played by the Cambodians, which from their resemblance to those that have been, and still are, played in India, since very ancient times, may well have been imported by the builders of Angkor. These were always included in the royal orchestra. They were the 'chapey', a guitar-shaped instrument; the 'takhe', also guitar-shaped, but standing on four legs, and played either with a plectrum or with the long nails of the performer; the 'tro', a sort of three-stringed 'cello, played with a bow; the 'thong', and 'ron-monea', two varieties of drum or tambourine with one skin; the 'crap-fuong', or castanets; and the 'peat-cong', a set of gongs suspended by cords from a raised stand, arranged in a circle, and played by a girl standing in the centre.[1]

The leader of the Angkor troupe is Princess Wongat Soysangvane, a member of the old Cambodian nobility. Her headquarters, and that of her troupe (except in the tourist season) are at Phnom Penh, where all the elaborately embroidered and bejewelled costumes worn by the dancers are made by her own clever fingers, so skilfully that a Willie Clarkson would have to look to his laurels to compete with them. The head-dresses are modelled in the art-studios at the Museum, and are all exact copies of those in the bas-reliefs. Madame speaks French fluently; and has many tales to tell of the Great Adventure of 1931, when she took her troupe to Paris to perform at the

[1] *Royaume de Cambodge*, J. Moura. (Leroux, Paris.)

Colonial Exhibition at Vincennes: where, it will be remembered, a reproduction of the central temple of Angkor Wat, approached by a Naga causeway, was one of the most remarkable features. The dances met with great success; but I was not able to hear any of their experiences from the little dancers themselves. So early do these children marry or reach the 'age-limit', that only three of the party that went to Europe were still members of the troupe in 1935; and not one of them had learned to speak French during their stay in Paris. Wherefrom it may be inferred that Madame was a most conscientious and efficient chaperone!

When word goes round that there is to be a performance of the dances at the Wat, the whole of the meagre population sets about making torches—by a process that has doubtless been the same for hundreds, if not thousands, of years; for in such matters the East does not change its fashions. A hole is made in the trunk of certain specially resinous trees, the wood scooped out, and a little straw fire lighted. After a while the cut 'bleeds' a sort of resin, which is collected much as latex is collected from *Hevea* for rubber. The resin is then mixed with decayed leaf fibre (never far to seek in these forests) into a stiff paste, rolled up in dry palm-frond to look like an enormous cheroot, and tied round with stiff grass. The tips of the fronds are left sticking out at the end to make the torch easy to light; and once lighted, it will burn for several hours.

By sunset, from the quiet road outside the Bungalow come all the unmistakable sounds that announce the presence of a crowd: shufflings of bare feet in the loose dust; whisperings, and a buzz of voices that is oddly subdued—the heritage, perhaps, of centuries of oppression and slavery. Soon, every small child from all the surrounding hamlets, each hugging a torch to his dusty, naked—or almost naked—body, has joined the group. The gathering darkness seems to be full of them; but probably there is a bare hundred at most: all waiting for the four copper cents that are the price of the carefully made torches they carry, and their own services as torch-bearers at the performance.

A CELESTIAL DANCER

One of the Apsaras, or Celestial Dancers: embowered in garlands of foliage so delicately carved that it is hard to distinguish them from the forest creepers that twine about them

Meanwhile they stand on the alert for the thrill so dear to the heart of childhood, whatever its race or rank: the behind-the-scenes appearance of the performers in the forthcoming show. They have not long to wait. One by one my little friends the dancers appear, and greet me with gentle caressing touches of their slim, supple fingers, which have to serve instead of words. But it is difficult to recognize their vivacious expressive features in the creamy-white uniformity into which their curiously flat 'make-up' has transformed them. They might almost have been whitewashed, so thickly are their faces plastered over with an opaque paste which destroys all expression, and on which the lips and eyebrows, touched up just like those of one of our Western Bright Young Things, stand out in startling contrast.

The green-room is the outer wall of the Great Wat's moat; and there we sit, the soft moonlight shining on the stiff gold brocade of the dancers' costumes, and on the pointed head-dresses so like those of the little Apsaras who dance tirelessly through the centuries up and down the galleries of the temple behind us, where presently their flesh-and-blood descendants will contribute their brief 'turn' to the immortal ballet.

The dancers are entirely self-possessed, but fully conscious that even here there is an audience (for by now all the adult villagers, as well as the children, are squatted on the grass in the shadows), and they play up accordingly. It may be that as a 'property' I am something of a welcome novelty. At all events I am gently crowned with a naughtily seductive — but appallingly heavy — head-dress, and adorned with several gem-studded armlets; whereupon it seems churlish not to co-operate in the fun, and my feeble burlesques of my fellow-performers' serpentine poses and wristwork meet with a success that any leading lady might envy. (Though there is always the chance that one might be far from flattered if one could fathom these apparently ingenuous people's real reactions to a foreigner's foolishness!)

Our curtain-raiser over, we sit quietly on the wall again, waiting till it is time to walk over the long causeway to the

Wat; and though we know next to nothing of each other's languages, we keep up an animated conversation, punctuated on their side with funny little doglike caresses and much soft laughter. Then at last we set out for the Wat. The torch-bearers have gone ahead; and as we cross the moat we can see lights, like larger editions of the fireflies that flit over the water, flickering here and there behind the pillars of the long outer colonnade, where probably they are playing some sort of 'tag' before settling down to the important business of supplying footlights for the show.

The dancers group themselves on the steps leading up to the huge central porch of the outer façade, where grass mats have been spread for them; and a more perfect background it would be impossible to imagine. Moreover it has the added charm that it was certainly in some such setting—possibly even in this very one—that the 'celestial nymphs' of long ago performed the original temple dances that these little maidens are perpetuating. And as for beauty: there was never a 'set' designed in any of the famous opera-houses of Europe, that could bear comparison with the weatherworn grey stones of the noble doorway and porch, its square pillars and high, uneven steps, illuminated by the warm flickering light of a hundred torches under the pale radiance of the moon; framing the pitch darkness of the haunted regions beyond, and melting away on either side to where the endless colonnades disappear in the gloom.

All round the centre space kept clear for the performance, on the warm, uneven flagstones, sit the tiny torch-bearers: some quite naked, all dirty; some with a ragged piece of cloth—perhaps a grubby yellow remnant of a bonze's discarded robe—draped any old how or where about their diminutive bodies. Dirty they may be; but a jollier, more friendly lot of brown babies it would be hard to find; for however apathetic the Cambodian may seem in later life, he is certainly not so in childhood. Those dusty youngsters are as alert as terrier puppies for mischief, and as responsive to the slightest encouragement; though they are as silent as deaf-mutes, and never dare wriggle more

than a yard or so from their places. Their only defection from duty is occasionally to lay a smoking torch down on the stones beside them and forget all about it until some angry elder appears to remind them of their responsibilities. One three-year-old comedian, with a face as mobile as Charlie Chaplin's, who is squatted a few yards away from me, makes such delightful grimaces that he succeeds in luring me into a sort of competition for our own private entertainment, which lasts the entire evening, and his delighted, dancing eyes at my silliest efforts will always be good to remember.

As the bizarre figures of the dancers come down from their places on the steps, to perform on the stage provided by the great cruciform terrace, you see that here in truth are the Apsaras come to life—except that now the upper part of their bodies is fully clothed. There is the same heavy 'langouti' or skirt, with its wide sash tied in front; the same thick anklets; the curious peaked head-dresses, and the faces made up to be as immobile as those of stone, with here and there among them masks reproducing the Rakshas, monkeys, or demons of the bas-reliefs. The whole scene is like some queer, fantastic dream, with its incredibly strange contrast between the vivid, colourful life in the foreground, and the tremendous mass of masonry behind it, aloof and impassive as a mountain range.

At first sight it seems incongruous: all this glitter and colour and theatrical posturing on the very threshold of the solemn old grey temple. Yet is it really so incongruous as it seems? Angkor Wat itself is the huge immortal proof that dancing-girls were no mere incidental detail in its life, but a matter of the most paramount importance. This mountain of masonry and treasure-house of art may have been dedicated ostensibly to the glory of the gods; but it is girls rather than gods that form the chief motif of its adornment. Not a corner or a doorway; not a wall or courtyard or gallery, inside or out, from which they do not smile down at you: alone, in little groups, or in twos or threes. They have never been counted and never will be; their numbers must run not merely into thousands,

but many thousands. I am afraid that the number of divinities represented on the walls of Angkor Wat would make but a poor showing in comparison with the number of Apsaras. For this was a royal temple, built by a king far greater than Solomon. And if the Ruritanian court of the Sultan of Soerakarta, even nowadays, has fifteen hundred or so dancing-girls as part of its personnel, what must not have been the accepted allowance for so fabulously rich a place as Angkor?

It has to be remembered too, that the brilliance of the scene is not by any means so inappropriate as we think. It is only to us that Angkor Wat is dark and mysterious; it was not always solemn and old and grey. In its heyday it must have been a welter of brilliance and colour, compared with which these little displays that we are watching in the torchlight are only a ludicrously feeble reflection. The only really incongruous figures in the picture are the audience—that party of stout, over-prosperous men and women, and vapid girls and youths who have just arrived 'de luxe.' . . . And yet, since the human type changes but little, even they may have played their parts in similar scenes in the days that are dead; they are dressed differently; perhaps that is all? There are two fat little men sitting with their short, stumpy legs wide apart, wearing tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles and smoking big cigars, with an air of having done full justice to the cuisine of the Grand Hotel (and the sight of them makes one more thankful than ever that that admirable hostelry is far enough away to prevent some of its guests affronting Angkor overmuch with their presence); there is a grey-haired, overdressed, buxom old woman, loaded with jewelry, and a younger edition of herself, presumably a daughter. The old lady, after asking disagreeably, 'Are you sure these are the best seats?' goes to sleep with her head sagging sideways, and snores faintly. A coarse young woman with thick, greasy black hair, and lips, finger- and toe-nails all tinted crimson, sits alone, expressionless as the Apsaras, but lacking their grace. There is a couple—'honey-

arms as may be: not a very pretty sight. The one refreshing exception is an energetic wholesome-looking young American girl in beret and sports-kit, very smart and slick, who walks round the ring of little torch-bearers, busily winding a Ciné-Kodak . . . an optimist, evidently! . . . And there are others, mercifully invisible in the shadows. . . .

But if you look beyond them, far above and away from the torchlit scene and its audience: there is the full moon, riding high, shining down on the grey old towers —so huge—so impassive—so very still. They have seen this kind of thing, with variations, so many times since that far-off day when their builders took down the bamboo scaffolding, and left them up there alone, piercing the sky. Probably they are thinking this a very poor sort of affair. 'Now, if you had seen the dances we had here in King Suchandsuchavarman's time, when the Chinese Ambassador came!' they seem to say. 'That WAS something like a show! But this . . . well . . .' and the old towers smile an enormous, superior, sandstone smile, and resume their dreamy contemplation of their reflection in the moonlit moat.

Next morning, if you stroll across the same terrace, and up the steps, in the cool grey dawn, on your way to one of those coigns of vantage that seem as though they had been specially designed for the purpose of watching the sunrise—every sign of last night's display will have vanished as completely as though it had been a dream. Not a vestige remains: not the remnant of a single half-burnt torch, nor even the ashes; so well do the temple's servants —the bonzes—do their work, even in these sad days of its decadence. The Wat looks as it always looks in the very early morning: a grey, deserted, rather chill old ruin. And you are forced to the admission, however unwillingly, that a 'show' in a so-called civilized country, of which all traces down to the last match and cigarette-end were removed between midnight and dawn, would be a rarity indeed—almost as great a one as Angkor itself!

During my first visit to Angkor in the more spacious

pre-depression times, when American tourists were common objects of the wayside, and some of the Siamese royalties paid a visit to the scene of their ancestors' triumphs, a command performance of the dances was given at the Wat, and special programmes printed in Siamese, French, and English. Of the quality of the Siamese version I am, unfortunately, no judge; the French was no worse than the production of any European language to be expected from Asiatic printers; but the English was too good not to be quoted, and serves moreover to convey some idea of the native legends that the dances are supposed to illustrate. Here is one of the items : 'King Chey-Chet goes a-hunting with his attendants. During this time his first wife [1] brings forth a son. The jealous second wife of the king orders the child to be buried and replaced by a piece of wood badly carved. When the king comes back she charges the poor mother with having brought forth a monster. Chey-Chet is awfully angry, he stamps the innocent lady and sentences her to death. The executioners take her away, hut as they are walking along they meet two officiers of the Giants' king who is the princess's father. The officiers ask for information and bring back the princess to her husband, imploring her forgiveness. The king changes the capital punishment into exile. The princess had a cat. This cat having seen and heard everything leads her mistress to the place where they had buried the baby. But he is mot to be fonnd as he has been taken to the Paradise by the Gods. So the cat beseeches the Genii and they give him back to his mother. One of the Genii accompanies them at the Giant's (the father of the princess) hearing of the misfortunes of his daughter the grows angry and gathers an army ta fight Chey-Chet. Chey-Chet is defeated and they become friends gain'. After this lurid episode (which it would have been hard to follow from the performance) the programme wound up with 'A Large Final Ballet'.

The temple dancers of ancient Cambodia who are perpetuated by these modern dancers had an important religious significance. They were symbolic of the Apsaras

[1] Evidently 'chief wife' is the meaning intended.

or celestial nymphs, whose favours in Paradise were regarded as amongst the highest rewards that awaited the righteous in the hereafter. Hence their appearance in such numbers on the walls of the Angkor temples is not so incongruous as is sometimes supposed; no more so, at all events, and certainly no more imaginative than the winged angels of our Western ecclesiastical decoration. It has even been suggested by some critics that so much do the angels of the Renaissance resemble them, that European sculptors may possibly have visited Cambodia, and there found their inspiration.

Be that as it may, the Apsaras have inspired many poets both before and since Henri Mouhot penetrated to their hiding-place. The earliest known description is that of a Cambodian poet named Pang, probably of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, some of whose works were translated by Aymonier in his *Textes Khmers*, published in 1878. As an historian Pang is probably negligible (unless on the score of originality); but he was inspired by these 'ethereal inhabitants of the heavens' to cry: 'These millions of gracious figures, filling you with such emotion that the eye is never wearied, the soul is renewed, and the heart never sated! They were never carved by the hands of men! They were created by the Gods—living, lovely, breathing women!' A modern French writer, E. Vedel,[1] described them as: 'visions of perfect grace with lotus blossoms in their hands; . . . dead maidens whose youth and charm have never died, left behind with us here to prove the grace and beauty of a vanished race!' And to crown their conquests, the present Cambodian king has set their most famous dances to verse.

A point that puzzles many is the distinction sometimes made between 'Tevadas' and 'Apsaras'. The former term is most often applied to the female figures standing alone in niches or in groups; and 'Apsaras' to those in the act of dancing. This much-argued point is cleared up by Groslier,[2] who says that, according to de Bellouère,

[1] *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1899.

[2] *Danseuses Cambodgiennes Anciennes et Modernes*, Groslier. (Challamel, Paris.)

the Apsaras were celestial courtesans and dancers, and the Tevadas, beings expressly created by the Gods to take the Apsaras' places on earth. The legend contained in the Indian epic 'Ramayana' relates that after the great battle between the Gods and Demons (Devas and Asuras), the Devas, who were the victors, kept as their spoil not only the Elixir of Immortality, but also all the Apsaras, who, with the Elixir, had been born in the churning of the Sea of Milk. They became the courtesan-dancers of Indra's heaven. But one of them loved a mortal, and bore him a daughter, who could not be received in Heaven owing to her part-earthly origin. So the Brahman priests brought her up on earth, where it was her special duty to dance before the statues of the Gods. She had three sons and seven daughters, of whom the sons became sacred musicians, and the daughters, the first Tevadas. Thus (says Groslier) it really matters little whether we call the dancers on the walls of Angkor by their celestial or their earthly title. For in either case they played the same part in the temple ritual: which was to dance before the images of the Gods.

Many interesting facts concerning the 'lokhon' or royal dancers of the Court of Cambodia have been collected by M. Groslier in the book just quoted, which is admirably illustrated with his own water-colours and drawings. And if, as seems inevitable, these dainty descendants of the Apsaras are doomed to extinction under the heavy tread of 'Progress', he will have at least done all that is possible, in his dual capacity as artist and savant, to put their story and the legends interwoven with it, on permanent record. The book was published just before the War, while the Court dancers, though already greatly reduced in numbers, were still an indispensable apanage of the King's entourage. Under King Norodom there had been five hundred of them, divided into three groups: the first under the control of the King's Chief Wife, and the other two under lesser princesses. In the reign of King Sicowath, the number of 'lokhon' had already fallen to seventy, of whom eight were 'premières'; with forty 'baby' dancers in course of training. A small allowance for food was made to each dancer on

her appointment; and every time a performance was given, the principals received one piastre (about 2*s*.) each; the wearers of masks, 50 to 90 cents; other dancers 25 cents, and the children 20 cents. Not princely salaries considered in terms of, say, the Russian Ballet; but the whole upkeep of the 'lokhon' added 30,000 to 35,000 piastres to King Sisowath's yearly budget, nevertheless.

Court performances of the dances were given on the King's birthday, the coronation anniversary, at the ceremonial hair-cutting of the royal children, and other such high-days and holidays. The costumes were kept in the charge of certain princesses appointed as their official guardians; each dress being marked with the name of the dancer who wore it, who had to fetch it on the day of the performance and return it immediately afterwards—and in good order, too, on pain of a whipping with the rotan.

Formerly the sampots for the leading characters, which were richly embroidered in gold, were imported from India, and cost about 100 piastres; but with the coming of the French and beginning of trade with Europe, they were bought from France instead, at about half the cost. The ornate sash worn round the waist was of velvet, covered with little discs of gold or silver like the scales of a fish, and embroidered with pearls; and the three pieces of a sort of apron worn over the sampot, and the wings of the 'bird' characters, were similarly decorated. None of the garments had any fastenings, and the wearers were sewn into them by the dressers for every performance.

No wonder that although an evening performance never started before 9 o'clock, the dancers' toilet began at 2 p.m. The first stage was to rub a decoction of saffron and coconut-oil all over the face, neck and arms, after which the face was further treated with Chinese white dissolved in water—anything but soothing to the complexion—and the eyebrows blackened with candle-smoke applied on a little stick of oiled bamboo. This beauty-salon treatment is the same as that used when celebrating a young girl's adolescence, or her marriage: and is also the same as that

Cambodian king's harem. It was the custom for parents of attractive daughters of six years old or so to offer them to His Majesty; and they would yoke up the bullocks and set off for the palace at Phnom Penh, however long and rough the track might be from their remote village. If the child found favour in the royal eyes, the father and mother might receive anything from 20 to 500 piastres, with a sampot or two thrown in, according to the little girl's age, looks, and the mood in which they happened to find the king. But in any case, with luck, they could count on leaving the little creature behind, probably never to see, or be seen by, its parents again.

When or why the Cambodian dancers abandoned the fashion of wearing only jewels above the waist, there is no record to say; but however that may be, their modesty in these latter days is so fierce that when, on the occasion of a ceremonial visit of the Governor-General, an attempt was made to find a quartet of dancers to impersonate the Apsaras, there was not one—much less four—willing to appear in public so indecorously clad! There might have been less difficulty in Bali, where women and girls of all ages walk abroad on their lawful occasions arrayed in a sarong and a head-cloth; though there too, strangely enough, they cover themselves just as prudishly as the Cambodians when they perform their temple dances.

It seems all too certain that soon my little friends, or others like them, will be all that are left to carry on the tradition of the Cambodian dancers. Those of the temples perished centuries ago, with the passing of Angkor's glory, surviving only on its carven walls; and Western influences have all but extinguished those of the king's court. But perhaps, after all, so long as the tradition is preserved and the dances kept alive, it matters little whether it is Cambodian king or American tourist who plays the patron. And if so polished a troupe as that of Princess Soysangvane can survive in these days of depression, there should be little fear for the future when better times return.

A silly, trivial accident was the means of cementing still

slender, lissom bodies. After scrambling daily up and down the breakneck sides of all sorts of huge ruins and coming off scatheless, I must needs step carelessly into a shallow ditch—to crawl home in agony on a savagely swollen ankle that felt as though every tendon had been dragged out by the roots. Further walking was out of the question; I could only cross my room by hopping like a very large and ungainly frog; and I lay on my bed grimly wondering how many days would have to be wasted thus impotently while Angkor called to me in vain.

Presently there was a gentle tap at my door; and there entered, not the expected 'boy', but Madame Soysangvane, carrying a small bottle which, she said, contained a remedy always used by the dancers for sprains and other such mishaps. She inspected the unsightly ankle—by now a shapeless object about twice its normal size; felt it all over with gentle, experienced finger-tips; and then applied some of her healing unguent, which had a faint, pleasant, aromatic smell, and a magically cooling and soothing effect. 'In twenty-four hours,' she announced with the calm confidence of the specialist, 'you will be able to walk as far as you like. It will be stiff, but not painful. The swelling will go down by degrees.'

It was not imagination that the grinding pain soon began to decrease. Twice during the day a soft little knock at the door announced the 'leading lady' of the troupe—always known as 'the Princess', as it was she who played this important part: a shy, sweet little creature (despite her triumphs in Paris) who had often sat beside me on the verandah steps, chatting away quite happily despite our lack of a mutual language, and seizing on Madame as interpreter if she should happen to appear. To-day, as Madame told me later, she had asked to be allowed to play the part of ministering angel; and if kindness can cure, the wealth of it that beamed from her big brown eyes, as she skilfully applied the sweet-smelling liquid from what I soon began to regard as a magic phial—must have contributed not a little to my amazing recovery.

friends were fully occupied. But they did not forget me even then. Again there was a knock at my door—a shyer one than ever—and there appeared a small boy very carefully carrying the precious bottle, and wearing an expression of portentous gravity (and very little else). But he made it quite clear by means of gestures, that he was the appointed messenger of healing; and he, too, deftly applied the lotion.

That night the pain had so much diminished that I could sleep; and when morning came, and I very gingerly moved the injured member, the expected jab of pain did not follow. Nor, even more surprisingly, did anything more than a slight ache greet my first attempt to put the still bulbous-looking thing to the ground. This (for all my faith) seemed altogether too good to be true: but I was at Angkor; where ghosts walk, and magic is the order of the day. I stood up; nothing happened. Took a tentative step; still no red-hot, agonizing stab; then another and another—and the miracle was achieved. A sprain that in the ordinary way might have crippled me for ten days, was cured, as Madame had promised, in twenty-four hours. It was still a horrible sight to see; but that mattered little if I could use it. And use it I could and did from that time onward.

What the magic bottle contained I have not the slightest idea. All I could find out was that it was prepared from herbs, and was a remedy that had been known to the dancers ever since there were dancers in Cambodia. It was just one of those 'primitive native remedies', as we patronizingly call them, that will perhaps be 'discovered' one of these days by our more enlightened Western chemists (like quininé, and a score of others) and added to the British Pharmacopœia.

And as for the little Princess: when at last the inevitable day came when I must say good-bye once more to Angkor, and I stood sadly watching the matchless outline of the Wat's lotus towers taking shape against the pale dawn sky —there was a soft rustle beside me, and a soft, slender little hand was slipped into mine. The rest of the troupe were still sleeping, but the little princess had risen to speed me

on my way. We said our wordless farewells; and then the dainty figure flitted noiselessly away again in the dim light; so softly that I was left wondering whether it had really been my little friend after all—or one of the Apsaras, hurrying back before the sun rose, to rejoin her companions on the walls of the Wat, whence she had come in the dawn to bring me a last message of farewell from the great temple? . . .

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A CITADEL OF WOMEN

Among all the gems of architecture that were found submerged in the jungle-ocean of the Angkor region, there is one of entirely different character from the rest. All the others take the beholder's breath away by their sheer stupendous size, before he has even time to realize their beauty; so much so that the widespread native belief that they could only have been built by the gods, does not seem at all unreasonable. But Banteai Srei, the 'citadel of women'—or Isvarapura, as it is also called—is an exquisite miniature; a fairy palace in the heart of an immense and mysterious forest; the very thing that Grimm delighted to imagine, and that every child's heart has yearned after, but which maturer years has sadly proved too lovely to be true. And here it is, in the Cambodian forest at Banteai Srei, carved not out of the stuff that dreams are made of, but of solid sandstone.

There is nothing particularly feminine about Banteai Srei to explain its name; nor is there anything to suggest that its origin was divine. If it was any other than human brains and hands that brought 'this lovely bibelot' (as a French architect described it) into being, it was not gods, but fairies, who had a share in it. It has no dignity nor solemnity whatsoever. It is a cheery little place—impudent, almost—a series of delicious toy temples and terraces, exquisitely decorated with incredible prodigality, as though to be a plaything for the children of some fabulously wealthy giant in Fairyland.

Why this anomaly should have found a place among all the tremendous architectural conceptions of the Angkor region, is only one more of the mysterious kingdom's baffling riddles. Banteai Srei has nothing in common with them except its lavish carved decoration. Even the almost universal plan of concentric squares is missing; so is the equally favourite Naga-balustrade, with its familiar fans

of upreared heads. And instead of lions, to guard the almost prim little steps that lead on to the narrow terrace surrounding each small temple, you are greeted by pairs of jovial little seated figures with comical faces, looking as though they had dressed up and put on masks to entertain at a children's party. Some have monkeys' heads, and wear a sort of beret with a tab; another couple have features adorned with wide and intimidating grins like the masks worn in the Bali 'good luck' processions, to frighten away evil spirits; others have long, sharp beaks, making them look like impudent jackdaws; yet others, sad to say, have lost their heads altogether. And the only pair of lions to be seen is dressed up in elaborately carved frilly ruffs, like Dog Toby; and instead of frightening away intruders, they smile at you as broadly as Cheshire cats.

You enter through a succession of small courts, leading to a group of miniature sanctuaries, each complete in itself, and covered with carving so delicate and detailed as to suggest the finest wood, or stamped-leather work. The variety of design is infinite, and far more originality is in evidence than elsewhere. The tall, gracious ladies that stand in their elaborate niches are obviously cousins of those in the other temples, but they are far more sophisticated, and have adopted attitudes and expressions unknown to them. 'False doors,' of sandstone, miniatures of those closing the ends of the outer façade at Angkor Wat, carved in imitation of the most ornate woodwork, give imaginary access to every sanctuary, on the sides away from the true entrance; and these are reproduced over and over again, each time on a smaller scale, on the tiers of tiny terraces that are piled up, one above the other, as a crown to each separate building. Every one of these fairy terraces encloses a miniature temple with deepset doorways, and each of these frames the 'false door', and is surmounted by an elaborately carved tympanum. Round every terrace little figures are seated—smaller in each ascending storey. The whole effect is that of a many-storied dolls' house: surely the most entrancing plaything ever devised in or out of Fairyland.

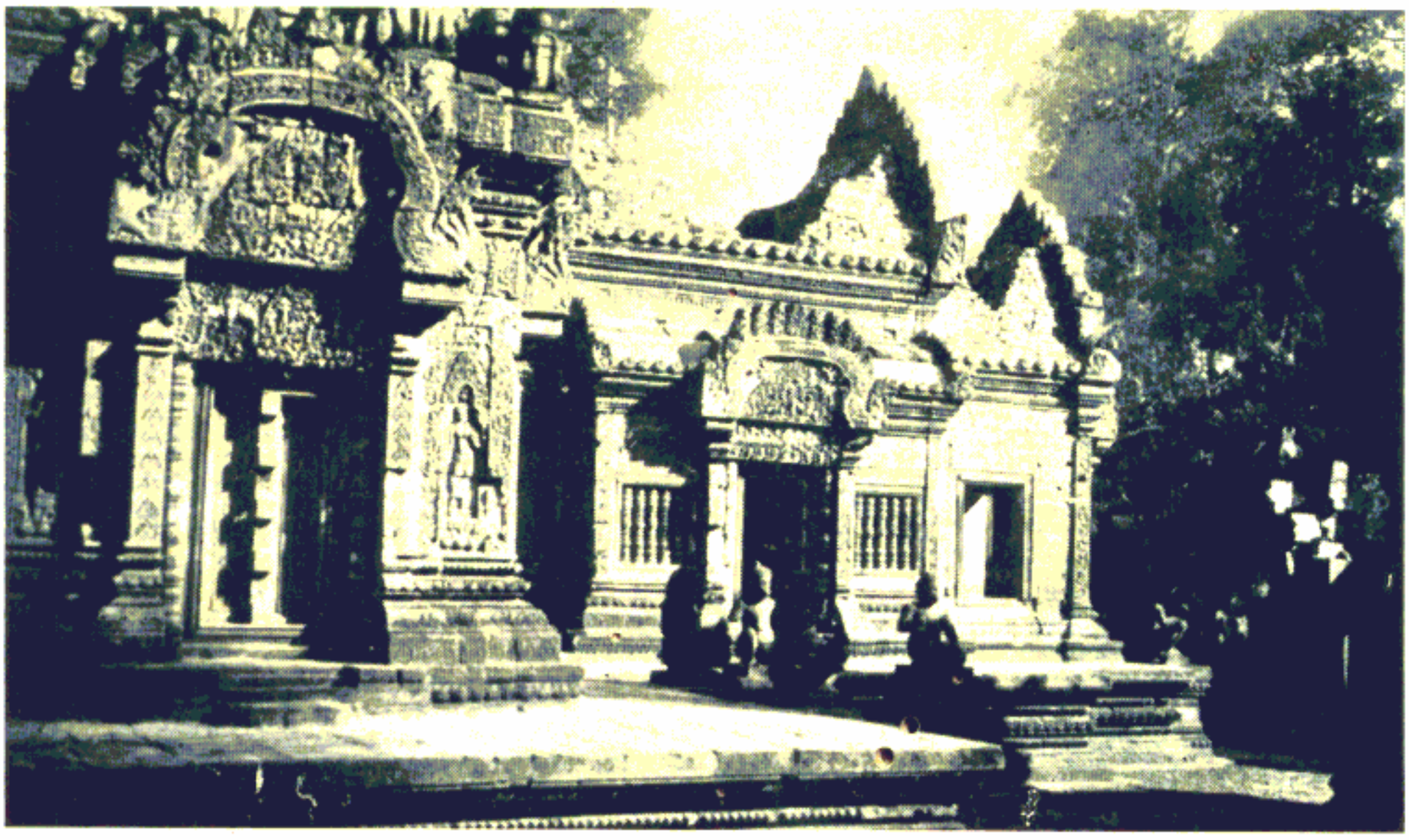
The centre group of sanctuaries is in so strikingly perfect

a state of preservation that it is no surprise to learn that they represent a very remarkable experiment in restoration by Henri Marchal, who went to Java in 1930 to study the Dutch methods of restoration in the Brahman and Buddhist temples. On his return he set to work to apply the system employed by the Dutch with such striking success at Boroboedoer and Prambanan, to Banteai Srei, whose miniature scale made it a less formidable undertaking than would have been the case with any of Angkor's architectural giants.

The group was in a sad state of ruin; but the scattered blocks were collected, and the fallen upper storeys were put together stone by stone, like jig-saw puzzles, on the ground. This done, the still-standing lower portions were dismantled, each stone being numbered as it was lifted off: a method rendered easier by the Khmer custom of building without mortar. Next, the foundations were strengthened with concrete, on which the storeys were built up again. Each sanctuary was similarly treated; and the central group now stands complete, almost as the hands of its first builders left it; the stones fitting so perfectly that were it not for photographs of the work in progress,[1] it would be impossible to believe how much of Banteai Srei had once been in ruins. They, however, are proof positive, showing the upper portions on the ground, being fitted together, and half-built sanctuaries in forests of bamboo scaffolding: scenes that probably differ but little from those of its first erection. An ingenious means was found of replacing missing stones—a difficult matter owing to the peculiar pinkish tint of the sandstone; the gaps were filled with blocks of cement, cunningly camouflaged with a coat of powdered stone, made by grinding up odd pieces that could not be located. In this way uniformity of colour was perfectly preserved.

All too few travellers take the trouble to visit Banteai Srei, and so miss seeing an exceptionally charming group in all its original perfection. Probably the reason of this neglect is the road; which is certainly rough and sandy, though it is quite reasonably good in the dry season. But what is a mild discomfort to the tourist was a serious diffi-

[1] In the possession of the Archæological Service.



A SANCTUARY AT BANTEAI SREI

Perfection in miniature at Banteai Srei. One of the small sanctuaries, with Hanuman, the Monkey God, on guard

A GROUP OF APSARAS

One of countless thousands—in an upper court at Angkor Wat

culty to those engaged in the restoration of this lovely temple; for the track is often impassable in the rainy months, and the work was held up over and over again in its most critical stages.

The tympanum, fallen from a porch between two of the courts, is one of the most perfect specimens of carving yet discovered in the whole Angkor region. Its fragments were pieced together by M. Marchal in 1932; and at the time of my last visit it was still standing on the ground, awaiting the reconstruction of its supporting porch. The story it illustrates is believed to be that of the Apsaras Tilottama, who was created to arouse discord between two redoubtable brothers, Sunda and Upasunda, whose mission was to sow desolation throughout the Universe. In the tableau each brother is grasping the lady by an arm, and a lively dispute is evidently in progress.[1]

There is much controversy about the date of Banteai Srei. An undated inscription in one of the sanctuaries commemorates the erection of a statue in honour of a deity rejoicing in the name of Tribhuvanamahecvara, by someone called Yajnavaraha: to whom inscriptions in other sanctuaries, dated 1304, refer as living at that time. Whence it was inferred that the whole group of sanctuaries was built about that period. But a few years ago, at Sek Ta Tuy, near Beng Mealea, an inscription was found dedicating a Linga to a god of the same lengthy name by the same donor: with the difference that Yajnavaraha was this time well and truly described as the 'guru' or teacher of King Jayavarman, who died in 1001! One would have thought that at least there was little likelihood of painting such a name as 'Tribhuvanamahecvara'; but it seems that there is no reason why there should not be more than one god bearing this impressive title, and that the 'guru' of the king reigning in 1304 might have taken the name of his predecessor in the tenth century! M. Coédès' reading of the riddle is that the portions of Banteai Srei 'dated' by this new find were built in the tenth century, and that as the undated parts are of the same style, all were probably built at the same time: such a theory being more probable

[1] The story is from the *Mahabharata*; translation by Jacobi.

than that the architects reproduced the same style three centuries later . . . and yet . . . what of the problems that may confront the archæologists who explore the ruins of London a few hundred years hence, if they come upon the remains of 'Liberty's'? Will they arrive at the same conclusion?

The miniature scale of Banteai Srei was formerly described as 'art in decadence', from which all the grandeur of architecture had perished, leaving only decoration behind. But recent explorations have revealed other temples equally small, in the north-east of Cambodia; and we are now warned against falling into the error of thinking that the vast scales of Angkor were the only style in which the Khmer architects excelled.

Banteai Srei was discovered relatively recently, and the descriptions I had heard of it had fired my curiosity to see it. The old bullock-track leading to it had been cleared, and I learned that though rough it was quite negotiable by car. But although (since the establishment of hotels de luxe in Siem Réap) the hire of a motor no longer presents the difficulties of a few years earlier, the price quoted in response to my enquiry proved that, in this respect at least, times had not greatly changed. Native education, however, had made strides in the interval; and it was this that proved my salvation.

As the only resident of the Bungalow I was inevitably a familiar figure to the native community of the hamlet of Trapeang Seh, near the entrance to the Wat, and we were soon on the friendliest of terms, despite the disabilities of language. Among the lads of the village who honoured me with their acquaintance was one who had been to school in the metropolis of Phnom Penh, and consequently spoke very fair French. In token, perhaps, of the social superiority thus acquired, he was usually to be seen in a suit of white (or rather, approximately white) crêpe-de-Chine pyjamas, very baggy and long in the legs, so that the heels were always dragging in the dust. His toilet was completed by grimy 'white' canvas tennis-shoes, a brown felt hat which he swept off with a low bow every

distressing manifestations, he was a most entertaining companion, and a mine of thoroughly unreliable information.

Some bright spirit has lately introduced into Cambodia the idea of fitting pneumatic tyres to the heavy, two-wheeled pony-carts; and that there was one of these vehicles in the village I knew, for I had sometimes met it, with a load of eight natives and their inevitable bags and bundles. It occurred to me that I might be able to hire the turnout to take me to Banteai Srei; for, long and rough though the road might be, the tiny pony between the clumsy shafts would surely be able to trip over it like a ballerina with only one passenger behind him. Accordingly I consulted my Cambodian friend Chun, through whom alone I could negotiate.

Next morning he came to me with a suggestion. Would I not prefer to go to Banteai Srei by motor, if he could manage it? He had a friend, a Chinese, in Siem Réap, who had recently taken to himself a new car and a bride. He wanted to take both to Banteai Srei, which he had never seen; and if I cared to go with them, it could be arranged very cheaply. So it was agreed (but by no means as quickly as it is written; the negotiations were elaborate and complicated, and lasted two days) that I should join the party and pay for the petrol. A highly satisfactory arrangement for all concerned; for the young couple got their outing for nothing, and I, at the minimum cost.

We set off the following morning at daybreak, taking with us a native who knew the way. We turned off the new motor-road near the Mebon, taking a sandy track running east, which we followed for a mile or two, passing through two villages, as yet, happily, so unsophisticated that the children ran out, dancing and shouting with excitement, to wave to us as we passed. At the second village we turned north again, on to a vague bush track deep in sand. And from thence onward, there was no sign of human life or habitation, nor of cultivation, except at one point, about half-way, where, among some poor rice-fields,

with jungle vines, walled with ragged grass mats, and roofed with piles of coarse grass and rice-straw, piled anyhow on the top. Here a few dusty, naked children and scantily clad women, bare to the waist, sitting or standing about on the bone-dry grass, seemed too apathetic—or perhaps they were too hungry—to be interested in our intrusion.

The road wound all the way through forest, and had been made passable by many primitive but effective bridges built of stout tree-trunks decked with corduroys of saplings laid at right angles to them, and bound with rattan. There were monkeys in hundreds; and bird-life everywhere. Several varieties of pheasant, very little perturbed by our appearance, showed themselves from time to time; and many others flashed across the sunny track too suddenly to be clearly seen. Even that royal fowl, the peacock, was not uncommon; one ran for some time in front of us, trailing his long tail in the sand like a fox's brush, before he 'took off', giving us a full view of his magnificent plumage as he rose; and further on we startled another cock into flight, attended by half a dozen of his harem.

We came at last to the high steep bank of a river—the same stream that waters Angkor and Siem Réap—and here, in a well-cultivated little garden, shaded with bananas and palms, stood a trio of neat native dwellings: the home, we were to learn later, of the *guardien* and his family, employed by the École Française to live near the ruins, and do what they can to keep the fierce growth of the jungle in check, and prevent it from engulfing the rescued buildings again in its savage tide.

It was evident that the crazy bridge that here spanned the stream had not been strengthened like the others we had crossed; so we left the car, and after crossing the river, walked on through the solemn shade of the forest, listening to the bird-calls that echoed high overhead, now that the noise of our engine was stilled. Soon we were rewarded by the sight which, after some time in these regions, you come instinctively to expect: that of ghostly grey masonry in among the ghostly grey boles of the trees. But here, instead of the mountainous masses that had grown so

of temples that might easily be dropped into any of the courtyards of Angkor Wat, and be hard to find again.

In the course of a delighted tour of investigation we soon came upon the *guardien* busily engaged in pulling out from between the stones the intruding seedlings that would so soon be strong young saplings if he gave them the chance; and presently we were joined by his wife, who had seen us, and followed us up the track from the river. She was a sad-faced woman, with lips and teeth horribly stained with betel-nut, but wonderfully responsive, and possessed of a most kindly and delightful smile. She was, of course, bare-headed and bare-legged, and wore a faded blue sampot and rough black cotton jacket. Fortunately my Chinese host had been born and bred in Cambodia, and spoke its language as well as his own, and was both sympathetic and interested, so that communication was easily established. The *guardien* was a shy and silent man, though obviously friendly; but his wife was eager to talk; and thanks to the Chinese, Mr. Tan, who was tireless as an interpreter, Mrs. Guardien and I were soon in animated conversation.

Many and strange—and some of them sad—were the tales she told us. She was something of a poet in her way: and so, perhaps, was her translator; for through him she spoke of the long days when, for months together, except for their own voices, they heard no sound save the notes of birds and the whirring of insects; and the strokes of her husband's axe and the crash of a tree as it fell, resounded through the forest as though it could be heard for miles. She spoke of the deep silence of the pitch-black nights, broken now and then by the mewing and growling of wild beasts hunting their prey; or as they came down to drink in the river just below the house, where their tracks betrayed them next morning when she went to draw water. Tigers there were in plenty—(she showed me the track, later, of one that had passed close by the house on its way to the drinking-place the night before); but those they did not mind so much. They did no harm; it was the

children, her face took on a sadder expression. Yes. She had six. But one, a boy of thirteen, had been killed by the bandits ('pirates', was the word the Chinese used) a few months ago. He had gone out in the forest with his bow and arrows to shoot squirrels for the cooking-pot, and had never returned. Afterwards they had found him dead, killed by a knife, and his bow and arrows stolen. The bandits were cruel men, she said, sadly, and there were many of them. They never knew when some might come their way, or what they might do. They would murder for no better reason than to get a handful or two of rice. Perhaps they had killed her boy for the sake of his bow; or else for the squirrels or perhaps a monkey he might have had—it would be an easy way of getting them.

She told us that the 'pay' drawn for the guardianship of the ruins was 9 piastres per month; which she had to fetch herself, going on foot all the way to Siem Réap—two days' journey each way—carrying back with her all the rice and other humble provisions that should keep the little household going for the month to follow. She slept the night at the poor hamlet we had passed; and when, as sometimes happened, her rice-supplies ran out before her next trip to 'town', she would go to this village again, and fetch two basketsful, for which she had to pay 50 cents.

So, for an hour or so, we photographed, idled, and chatted on, until someone suggested it was time to think about the return journey. At this, the *guardien's* wife asked shyly if she might offer us a meal? She had not much, she said. But she could kill a fowl to eat with our rice, and there were vegetables . . . . I was more than willing; the young Chinese couple were charmingly ready to do anything I wished; so we accepted—with the proviso that no fowl should be slain; for in that remote wilderness they would certainly be precious possessions as egg-producers.

Off trotted our hostess ahead of us along the narrow path leading to the river and her home, her cropped, straight black hair flopping over a brow knitted already with housewifely cares. We followed

the path down to the river's brink and a delicious natural bathing-place—where a cloud of small white butterflies rose at our approach; and on arrival at the clearing where he had made his home, he insisted on my resting, in embarrassing royal isolation, in one of the neat little buildings: a grass-roofed, raised platform, enclosed on three sides to within a few inches of the floor, so as to admit a refreshing draught, and reached by a bamboo ladder. He fetched a roll of new, clean mats, and spread them for me, adding a pillow—not, perhaps, quite so clean—and there left me. Presently I saw him hurrying back over the bridge and up the path into the forest; whence he shortly returned, carrying a bunch of bright green leaves, which he washed carefully in the river before vanishing with them towards the house.

I was dozing lazily on my pile of mats, enjoying the cool breeze in that cunningly planned little resting-place, though it was midday, when he appeared once more, bearing a laden tray a yard long, made of two stout planks. I hardly knew him. The little old man that I had last seen clad only in a pair of old blue shorts, was now figged out in long white trousers and a 'Zip' shirt, spotless though unironed. He placed his tray carefully beside me; and then, pointing first to the camera, and afterwards to his own modish person, made it clear that he wanted to 'pose' again —as he had already done in his workaday garb, among the ruins. I signified my willingness, and picked up the camera, when off he went again at full speed to the house—to return followed by his wife; who, doubtless torn away willy-nilly from her hospitable preparations, was still in her working clothes. But Ek Tos made up by his own splendour for anything that she might lack. He brought back with him this time a spotless pipe-clayed topee, and clasped this symbol of civilization firmly to his bosom when at last the photograph was taken.

I had posed them in the open, most effectively, against a background of dark foliage; but for some reason they did not seem altogether satisfied. I chose another place, and

then at his own face, which he screwed up into a comical grimace—led his wife into the shade of the house, an pointed to the camera again. At last I understood that a sun snapshot, with its unbecoming high-lights and shadows, was not what they wanted; so I obediently set up the tripod and took a 'studio portrait', after which they departed satisfied.

(They explained later through our tireless interpreter that they greatly desired to send portraits to their children in distant parts of the country. And I am glad to be able to state that the photographs, which were excellent, were duly sent back to them through the Conservator, so that they were able to carry out their wish.)

The important affair of the photograph safely over, Mrs. Tos disappeared with her spouse into the kitchen, whence they reappeared very soon, she carrying a big bowl of rice, and he following with the refilled tray, whose former contents had been set on the floor beside me. The Chinese couple, who had been bathing in the river, now came to join me at the truly marvellous meal that our humble, kindly hosts had managed to conjure up out of next to nothing. I had vetoed the sacrifice of a fowl; but that had not prevented them from setting quite a varied menu before us. The foundation, of course, as at all Eastern meals, was rice: to which we helped ourselves with a home-made wooden spoon on to plates that were smooth squares of banana-leaf; afterwards adding a variety of etceteras from an array of rough little blue Chinese bowls and saucers. One of these contained dried fish, boiled and served hot; another, a vegetable something like stewed cucumber, floating in some sort of soup; another, a salad of the leaves which I had seen our host bring in from the forest, which, I learned, is called 'réan'; another was filled with rough, whitish grains that turned out to be salt; and several others with condiments to which I was unable to give a name. Added to all this was a wire griller filled with dried fish evidently toasted over the fire—a very favourite Cambodian dainty. It was hot and crisp, and far more palatable than one, having only known it by its aroma in the native markets, would believe. The final touch was

dessert: a pile of bananas, served hot, having been boiled 'in their jackets'; not a very seductive fruit in this form, but a generous attempt to make good the deficiency due to the ravages of porcupines, which had eaten all the ripe ones! We drank sparkling water dipped in half coco-nut-shells from an iron cooking-pot: water which, our hostess was at some pains to reassure us, had been boiled; and not content with that, she brought us a further supply when the feast was ended, to rinse our hands. Not by any means a superfluous courtesy; for the wooden rice-ladle was the only piece of cutlery; and we helped ourselves to all the other delicacies in the oldest of all fashions, with our fingers.

Our host and hostess refused to eat with us, but insisted on serving us, hospitably pressing us to eat, and then standing back to regard us with anxious eyes, and an expression of mingled pride and humility that was somehow very touching.

The time came at last to take our leave; and if the translation of old Ek Tos's farewell speech, by the good-natured Tan, was anything like a correct one, our host and hostess were as genuinely sorry to see us go as we were to say good-bye to them. The small present I offered was received with gratitude out of all proportion to its value; and it seemed to me that there was real affection shining in the sad eyes of Mrs. Ek Tos as she squeezed my hand. I looked back as we drove slowly away through the deep, soft sand of the track: to see them still standing motionless side by side, exactly as they had stood to have their photograph taken. They neither smiled nor waved. And as I had my last glimpse of them before they were hidden by a bend in the road, their image was as sharply impressed on my memory as ever it could be through the lens of my camera. It seemed to me that they were symbolic in their immobility, and their philosophic acceptance of whatever Fate might bring: whether it were tigers or bandits or pilfering porcupines; privations or hardships or the violent death of their little son; the long lonely walk, heavily laden,

selves. For it was surely that same patient philosophy that enabled their ancestors to endure the superhuman labour that built the marvels of Angkor.

The creators and designers have vanished, and their inspiration has died with them. But the descendants of those who toiled to give their dreams material form still survive. And though the mighty Khmers may have perished as a nation, something of the element that made them great, lives on in these humble remnants of their race.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A ROYAL CREMATION

There are no tombs in Cambodia as there are in Egypt. The Khmer dead, both kings and commoners, are safe from modern desecration; for their bodies were so disposed of as to leave nothing that could feed our curiosity.

Tchou Ta-Kuan was anything but favourably impressed by the funeral customs in vogue among the common people of Angkor at the time of his visit. To the Chinese aristocrat it was no doubt unthinkably barbarous that the dead should be denied the last sanctuary and repose of a coffin; he remarks acidly: 'They do not bury their dead; they wrap them in mats, and carry them outside the city, where they abandon them to the dogs and the birds of prey. And they believe that if all is soon over and all trace of the body removed, it means that the dead person was virtuous; if not, it will be longer before the remains are consumed.' It is possible that what he saw was done as an act of piety by some humble Buddhist: the so-called 'burial by the birds', in imitation of the Buddha, who desired that after his death his body should be disposed of in this way. A case of this occurred as recently as 1859, when King Ang Dvong of Cambodia gave orders with almost his last breath that his body should be cut in small pieces and placed on golden platters for the birds to eat—an order that was duly carried out.

If the Chinese diarist's next observation was correct, it goes to prove the truth of the aphorism that there is nothing new under the sun; and that our most up-to-date and hygienic method of disposing of our dead—by cremation—which is only now being introduced into some of our highly-civilized Dominions, was the very latest thing also in Angkor in his time! For he adds: 'But nowadays, some people are beginning to burn their dead'; adding in parenthesis: 'These, however, are all the descend-

ants of Chinese.' There is, unfortunately, no means of knowing whether this statement was merely due to Tchou's conviction that all good things must come out of China, or whether it was founded on fact so far as the humbler part of the community was concerned, and that cremation was reserved for royalty. But in either case, much earlier Chinese chroniclers speak of the ceremonial burning of the Khmer kings; and the Cambodian royalties of to-day claim that their cremation ceremonies are exactly the same as those of their remote ancestors.

In modern Cambodia cremation is general among all classes, but seldom takes place until long after death. In the case of poor people, the body is buried first, and exhumed when circumstances permit of its being cremated—which is similar to the practice in Bali. M. Paul Collard, who for 24 years was a representative of the French Government in Cambodia, tells a story of a poor old native woman whose son died of cholera and was hastily buried. The mother never gave up hope of being able to do her boy the last honour of perfect purification, and at last, after ten years, had saved the few necessary piastres. With the aid of the bonzes of the village, the shallow grave was opened; and as the bones came to light, the poor mother would allow no one else to touch them, but lifted them out one by one and laid them on a brass tray, on which she carried them to the river and washed them. Then, making a fire of wood from the forest, she burned the bones and collected the ashes in a rough white earthenware bowl. This she covered with a white cloth (white being a token of mourning) and placed it among all the other pitiful remains of the village dead, in the place reserved for these in the bonzery, where it would remain, safe from disturbance, until the end of all things.[1]

A royal cremation is, of course, another matter. The remains are the subject of long and strange ceremonies before the climax of purification by fire is reached. An excellent description of these (which readers who are not strong-stomached would perhaps be well advised to miss!)

[1] *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*, P. Collard. (Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Challamel, Paris.)

is included by M. Collard in his book on Cambodia,[1] from which the following extracts are taken:—'King Norodom, the last of the "absolute" kings of Cambodia died of cancer in 1904 at the age of 70, and was succeeded by the "obborach", or Heir Apparent, his brother Sisowath. The day after death, the body was dressed in a rich sampot and many jewels, with an ingot of pure gold in the mouth, and crowned by Sisowath with a big gold crown. It was then placed in a kneeling position, with the hands crossed on the breast—the attitude of the Cambodians in adoration of the gods—in a bath of mercury, in a silver-gilt shell. For two months the shell remained in a special pavilion of the palace, where daily ceremonies took place; and was then removed with great pomp to a "chapelle ardente" where the shell was placed in an urn nearly ten feet high, made of pure gold and weighing 300 "domlongs" (11,250 gr.). Its cost was about £2,000. It stood on a nine-tiered pedestal 16 feet high, entirely covered with gold-leaf, in which 2,200 domlongs of gold were used. The whole was surmounted by the royal seven-tiered parasol. The funeral expenses for which the king's will provided were over £50,000. The urn was never left alone; night and day the bonzes prayed beside it; and four times a day, seventy official mourners—one for every year of the king's life—came to weep. Every morning the royal princesses brought a rich repast on golden dishes for the august dead; and around him, on golden trays, were laid his clothing, jewels, and weapons. Thus the daily spectacle went on from 24th April, 1904, to 11th January, 1906!

'The delay was partly due to the necessity to collect the special rare timbers, of particular dimensions, required by tradition in the erection of the "Men" or funeral pyre. The four corner-posts, especially, are hard to find, even in forests as rich as those of Cambodia in splendid trees; and the most distant corners of the great northern forests were scoured for them. A great cyclone, which claimed thousands of victims, further delayed their finding; but at last the magnificent structure was ready, its super-

[1] *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*, P. Collard. (Société d'Éditions Géogra-

imposed roofs each ending in an upturned Naga head; the whole crowned with a tall slender spire.

'The first of the final ceremonies was the removal of the urn from its pedestal, and for the first time in history, a European, M. Collard, was permitted to see all that ensued. To the sound of the murmured prayers of seventy bonzes, the urn was gently lifted down its nine steps, and carried to a table surrounded by the royal family. Here the shell was removed from the golden urn, and the contents, now liquid, poured into a great silver bowl. From this blackish liquid there rose a strong, but not at all repugnant odour, in which the sandalwood used in the last toilet of the dead, was predominant.

'The special attendants whose duty it was to carry out the next part of the ceremony, now approached. But the late king's favourite daughter, Princess Malikar, insisted on breaking the custom established by centuries of usage, by herself performing the last melancholy functions. She was a beautiful and determined young woman, who had been indulged and adored by the late king—decidedly a "modern"—and time-honoured custom had to give way before her.

'She plunged her hands into the liquid, and withdrew the bones one by one, gently rubbing them with her fingers to remove the muddy deposit adhering to them, before laying them out on a piece of material richly embroidered with gold. When presently the skull came to view, the princess burst into tears, and, holding her beloved father's head in her left hand, she softly caressed it, until its structure showed white and clean. Then, laying it carefully down, she plunged her hands in once more and withdrew a shapeless mass—the rich sampot in which the dead king had been dressed for the last time. It was followed by the blackened jewelry; and then at last all was laid out in order on the cloth of gold, with the skull in its proper place.

'The Princess then fell on her knees before the remains, touching the floor with her forehead. She was followed by all the other members of the royal family, and finally all sprinkled sandalwood essence over the bones.

in the new king's presence; and the bones, in the golden urn, were conveyed, after several days' further ceremonies, in an immense procession of elephants, horses, palanquins, soldiers and parasols, to the "Men", where the nine-tiered pedestal had been set up afresh. The cortège paraded all the streets of the town and made three circuits of the "Men" before the urn was deposited there for its seven days' lying in state. Hundreds of bonzes chanted around it night and day, and the mourners came to wail at regular intervals. At night the scene was illuminated with torches; and at the four corners were four Nagas of fire. Thousands of pilgrims came from all over the country to pay their last respects to the king, by elephant, bullock-cart, on horseback and by river. They slept in the ever-open "salas" of the bonzeries, and in the open on the banks of the river.

'On the last day of the lying in state, the bones were washed for the last time, soaked in perfumes, and placed in another urn, made of the rare and sweet-smelling "eagle-wood". The pedestal was reduced in height by four of its tiers; and all was ready for the climax at five o'clock, when, with a taper ignited from a lamp which had been lighted during the last rays of the sunset on the day that King Norodom died, and kept burning for this purpose, King Sisowath set fire to the immense catafalque on which rested the last pitiful remnants of a great king. The final act of the long-drawn-out funereal drama took place the next day; when the king's ashes were placed in a small golden urn, and taken in state to join those of his predecessors in the special chapel in the Palace. The ashes of the funeral fire were also collected according to custom, and scattered on the waters of the Mékong.'

Times have changed since King Norodom died; and at the royal cremation at whose final ceremonies I had the good fortune to be present recently, the ancient ceremonial had been very skilfully brought up to date; though the effort to blend the ways of East and West, resulted, as always, in ludicrous moments. The occasion was the cremation of an aged Cambodian Princess, which took place at Phnom Penh in January, 1935, and the scene

of the ceremony was a fine grass park or pleasure-ground, surrounded on all four sides by shady avenues. Facing one of these stands the picturesque museum with the curving snake heads of its roofs outlined against the sky; and on another, the high wall of the Palace enclosure, above which the topmost pinnacles of the Royal Pagoda and the Audience Hall are just visible. The 'Men'—in this case a lofty pagoda constructed entirely of white woven material spangled with silver stars, mounted on a bamboo framework—had been erected in the centre of this park, and the effect of the slender wings of white, draped from the peak of the pagoda to the four corners of a temporary courtyard that surrounded it, seen from the distance against the green background, was charming. The entrance to this enclosure, adorned by rows of flowering plants in ornamental Chinese pots, faced the King's place in the royal marquee, which was one of several set up for the occasion.

The funeral procession, bizarre though much of it seemed to Western eyes, did not fail nevertheless to convey an impression of dignity. Rank upon rank of Buddhist bonzes, in their voluminously draped robes of saffron yellow, marched in front, chanting solemnly and by no means unmelodiously, even to European ears. Behind them, in gorgeous array, came the Court officials and ladies of the Royal Household, each in a sedan-chair carried by two men, and shaded by a big parasol held by an attendant: the colour of the parasol varying according to the rank and station of the person whose head it covered.

The body of the old Princess was enclosed in a gilded wooden shell, shaped, like that of King Norodom, in such a way as to accommodate the body in a kneeling position. It had rather the effect of a headless, limbless torso; and rode proudly upright on the back, and between the wings of a glittering golden dragon about thirty feet long, whose motive power was a motor-car, on which it was mounted—looking, it must be confessed, less like a hearse than a competitor strayed from the carnival at Nice! And the many-tiered pagoda-parasols, carried by hundreds of boys, which flanked the procession along its whole long length, did much to strengthen this impression. But the unutterable

melancholy of the strange, monotonous tuneless rhythm—you could scarcely call it music—that came from the two orchestras of flutes and drums which preceded and followed the rather grotesque funeral car, effectually dispelled the idea that the occasion might be a festive one.

For some hours the cortège marched through the principal streets and boulevards of the town; and then turned into the park where the final ceremony was to take place at the customary hour of five o'clock. Three times round the 'Men', now turning orange in the late afternoon sunshine, the strange procession paraded, the dragon's glittering head bobbing raffishly above those of the solemnly chanting monks, and the roar from the motor in its vitals mingling oddly with their melancholy litanies, in a queer mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. (The roar, I fancy, was the result of an engine kept racing by a native chauffeur, fearful of retribution if it should stall, and interrupt the funereal snail's pace of the procession.)

At last the cortège halted; and the gilded shell was lifted from the panting dragon and placed on a covered dais, some six feet square, in the heart of the 'Men'; where, draped with a sort of shawl made of mixed real and artificial flowers, threaded and woven together on wire, beneath a hanging canopy of the same make, it looked more than ever like a headless, gilded goddess, seated on a pedestal.

Fortunately the place into which I was ushered was immediately behind the heavily gilt armchair presently to be occupied by King Monivong, and I thus had an uninterrupted view of the whole proceedings. A rich carpet covered the ground, and a strip to match led from the King's seat to the bier, between rows of flowering plants in pots, and balustrades formed of gilded serpents with gaping jaws. On the King's left, within arm's length, was a round table, covered with a crimson cloth richly embroidered in gold, and loaded with ornate golden cups and vessels studded with gems: among which a tin of 'Abdullah' cigarettes and a box of matches, hurriedly deposited there by an agitated Gentleman in Waiting just before the King's arrival—struck a rather discordant note. Probably

however, none of that priceless collection could have been less easily spared; for almost the first Royal gesture was to reach for the precious tin, and His Majesty hardly ceased smoking during the whole of the proceedings.

A military band, in quasi-European tropical uniform, was drawn up near the entrance to the park; and presently the strains of the 'Marseillaise' drowned the melancholy droning of the native orchestras, and announced the arrival of the King and the French Resident Superior, whose cars pulled up together. They must have been a trifle before time: or else perhaps punctuality is not one of the virtues of Cambodian Court officialdom; for there was an awkward moment when the King's Umbrella Bearer rushed out from among the Gentlemen of the Household, assembled just behind me, and raced across the wide space of grass to the entrance, his rich purple silk sampot creaking audibly as he ran, revealing some startling glimpses of stout bare legs garnished with sock-suspenders. East and West do not always combine happily in sartorial fashions; and in the case of the sampot, worn with socks or stockings, it is literally true that 'never the twain shall meet' without a rift of some sort! However, the official arrived, panting heavily, just in time to unfurl an enormous black, befrilled umbrella over the King's head as he stepped out of his car, and entered the park, chatting with the Resident.

A number of native officials, and several Europeans followed, and took their places in the rows of gilded chairs beside and behind the King—His Majesty having first shaken hands with us all round; for the French have transmitted to Cambodian society their national passion for handshaking, and manners in Phnom Penh leave you in no doubt as to the essential Frenchness of the Protectorate! There followed a pause, while the bonzes, now in mass formation round the bier, gravely chanted their sonorous requiem.

An attendant then appeared, carrying a large gilded tray loaded with sprays of yellowish flowers, all standing stiffly upright like little soldiers at attention. He knelt in front of the King, who selected a spray; then bowed before each of the guests in turn while they helped themselves. When it came to my turn to take one, I saw that the dainty

blossoms were beautifully made of sandal-wood shavings, with curling petals and even stamens complete, and the stem of each spray stuck in a section of sugar-cane, to hold it upright.

Hard on the heels of the first servitor, came another, the tray this time being piled with small white muslin bags just like old-fashioned lavender-sachets, tied up with black ribbon. They had a pleasant aromatic smell, and were, I imagine, filled with spices.[1] This second tray-bearer also, after kneeling before the King, presented his offering to each of us. . . . Another souvenir of a unique occasion, I thought contentedly to myself.

But I was soon disillusioned. Those charming gifts were by no means intended to be kept as souvenirs. The King rose from his seat, and walked slowly forward alone to the bier, and there laid both flowers and spices beside the queer-shaped golden coffin. The Resident Superior followed; and after him we all filed solemnly up with bowed heads (exactly like communicants walking up an English church aisle to the altar), to lay our offerings beside the departed. I had just time to tear off two or three blossoms from my spray, and stuff them furtively out of sight, expecting every moment to be arrested for Lèse Majesté. But luckily nothing inopportune happened. I played my part with due solemnity, and added my quota to the delicately scented pile; parting regretfully from the little spice-sachet, which there seemed no chance of salving.

Returned to our places, we sat at ease, while the Court ladies, emerging from their own marquee, and a long procession of other Cambodian mourners, filed up and brought similar tribute, till the pile round about the coffin must have been a yard in height. The bonzes continued unbroken, though more softly, their solemn chant, and the King puffed thoughtfully at his Abdullah. Then, without warning, came the loud report of a gun; and His Majesty, throwing his cigarette away, rose to his feet, followed by the whole assemblage.

An attendant appeared, and, kneeling, handed the King a lighted taper, about a yard in length. The King took it,

[1] These flowers and spices are used at all royal funerals in Cambodia.

and stepped forward, to apply the flame to the yawning mouth of the golden serpent that twisted in graceful curves along one of the balustrades bordering the way to the 'Men', its tail resting on the bier. There followed an explosion—and, crackling and smoking, a tongue of flame raced the length of the snake's body; until, reaching the coffin, it set fire to the mass of inflammable wood-shaving flowers and the flimsy bags filled with bone-dry spices, and with a roar, the whole funeral pyre burst into flames; and a column of smoke rose high into the still afternoon air.

It was a fine dramatic climax; but anti-climax followed close behind. King Monivong lighted another cigarette; the Resident Superior, with the air of one who has performed a duty somewhat beneath his dignity, shook hands with the King and took his leave, followed by the other French officials and their wives, all wearing the same air of bored superiority. And then, when the dense cloud of smoke that had enveloped the catafalque had rolled away, the conflagration that had started so bravely proved to have fizzled out; whereupon half a dozen attendants, like so many housemaids, set about lighting it up again with a lack of ceremony in painful contrast to the one just concluded. The sprays that had been brought a few minutes earlier as a last offering to the dead Princess were now reduced to the rôle of kindling, and were dipped in sandal-wood oil and dabbed against the sides of the shell, until with the further aid of many matches, the flames slowly took hold again.

Meanwhile the native orchestras were producing a droning accompaniment so utterly depressing, that even the King himself appeared unable to bear it, and signed to the musicians to cease. Then, seeing that the fire was well alight at last, he shook hands with what remained of the company, helped himself to a last cigarette, and walked off across the grass towards his car: an imposing red limousine, flying the Royal flag. The Umbrella Bearer, late as usual, hurried after his master, with a great show of fat legs and garters as before; while behind him came another stout King's Gentleman, carrying the Royal hat (a fawn-coloured European felt) and the indispensable tin of cigarettes. The military guard of honour, the effect

of whose white tropical uniform was much enhanced by natty yellow berets and bright blue puttees, smartly presented arms; His Majesty dived from beneath his huge parasol into his car, and before you could realize it, had disappeared—and the show was over. The remaining onlookers drifted away; and the place was empty but for the bonzes, who gathered, still chanting, around the dead, whom they would guard in detachments until the ashes should be gathered in their golden urn, and taken to their last resting-place in the Palace chapel.

There I, too, left them. And the last impression I had of the scene when I turned to look over my shoulder as my 'pousse' trotted away under the great over-arching trees, was a vague blur of saffron yellow against a background of vivid green, from whose midst a thin column of blue smoke rose lazily into the fast-fading evening sky.

As I looked there came suddenly to mind the memory of another cremation: a thoroughly scientific modern affair as cold-blooded as its patent furnace was hot, to which I had recently been admitted behind the scenes. The coffin (containing the mortal remains of some worthy citizen unknown to me) had vanished from the sight of the sorrowing relatives, sliding through a hatch in the wall of the chapel, to be received on the other side on an iron barrow in a bare laboratory in the centre of which stood a big square furnace. Into this—when the various gauges and gadgets registered the required temperature—it was shot from the barrow by a burly mechanic, who spat loudly on his hands as he did so; to be inspected at intervals through peepholes at the head and feet, until it was 'done'.

The contrast was intriguing: the old Cambodian princess, smouldering away in the quiet tropic darkness, surrounded by solemnly chanting, yellow-robed monks; and the late respected Mr. X in an iron furnace in a concrete laboratory, with a mechanic working levers to regulate the heat . . . and I am by no means sure that in this matter of cremation, as in so many others, our Western civilization has any very great advantages to offer—even to a corpse!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ADVENTURE IN WONDERLAND

The moment you leave the road in the Angkor region—or, for the matter of that, anywhere else in modern Cambodia—you go back a thousand years or more. Not to 'the glory that was Angkor' by any means; but to its humble outskirts, whence must have been drawn some, at least, of the poor toilers whose flesh and blood, as much as the stones, went to the building of its temples.

For this reason, any quite unimportant excursion that is a little off the track, even in these latter days, takes on the nature of an adventure. You may not be far in actual physical distance, from the road that links you to our too-familiar age of noise and speed and petrol; but in all else you are immeasurably remote. The people, the ramshackle houses—mere crazy mat-and-bamboo, or wooden shelters; the bullock-carts of curious design that stand in their shade; the whole primitive character of everything about you: all belong unmistakably to the things that do not change; to that very life that was so abundantly illustrated in the bas-reliefs of the Bayon.

Why Banteai Samrei—the 'tower', or 'citadel, of the Samraei'—should be so called, is no clearer than the reasons for the native names of most of the other groups of ruins. The Samrei are a primitive race of nomads inhabiting the regions around and among the Kulen mountains, where they clear and burn off small areas of forest in order to cultivate rice. They are regarded by the Cambodians as savages, and it is thought that they may be the 'savages' of whom the Chinese traveller Tchou Ta-Kuan spoke, as 'being unable to understand the language'. They have a distinct language or dialect of their own; and, according to educated Cambodians, speak Cambodian, when they learn it, with a foreign accent. In Moura's time, when the ruins all over the country were first being discovered by Europeans, many of these Samrei were placed in charge as

guardians and to clear away undergrowth, and their curious customs came under observation for the first time. Among others noted by Moura was their method of dealing with their dead, whom they never burned, but wrapped in mats, after tying their hands and feet together with the hands clasped, and then buried with the head towards Angkor Wat, which they believed to have been built by the Gods. A very ancient custom had made it the duty of these people to gather a certain kind of nut, peculiar to the Kulen range, the crop of which was the hereditary right of the governors of Siem Réap. But why a ruin some twenty miles distant from their haunts should have come to bear their name is a mystery. One would have thought it might have been more appropriately given to Banteai Srei ('citadel of women') which lies among the foot-hills of the Kulen mountains.

But Angkor is made up of such unexplained mysteries, and they only whet the desire to explore them further. According to Aymonier, local native belief attributes the erection of Banteai Samrei to a king called Ta Tasak Phaem, which means 'the ancestor of the savoury cucumbers': a story evidently bearing some relation to the legend recorded by Moura and others, of the gardener Neay-trasac-paem, who became king after slaying his sovereign in mistake for a thief, come to steal the cucumbers for which he was famous! In Aymonier's time the ruin was alternatively known to the natives as 'Prah Teai Samrei', or 'the holy God of the Samrei'.

In Groslier's opinion, however, this little-known group of beautiful buildings was one of the first Brahman monasteries erected by the Khmers, and can have had little to do with a wild mountain tribe. It is a curious and melancholy place; and though it is quite near to Angkor, the native who showed me the way to it told me it was ten years since any European, other than members of the Archæological service, had been there. Yet, soon after the discovery of Angkor, it was one of the first to be found and described by the explorers who followed Mouhot.

Modern tourist exploration, however, follows only the admirable roads provided by the Protectorate Government,

and consequently Banteai Samrei is scarcely better known than if it were a hundred miles from Angkor Wat. So that all sorts of amusing minor obstacles had to be negotiated before I could carry out my mild and unadventurous plan of visiting it.

'Banteai Samrei?' My stout friend Hoa for once seemed to be at a loss, though his broad, flat countenance was as expressionless as ever. But he had hitherto proved himself a person of such infinite resource and sagacity that I felt sure he would not fail me now. Nor did he. Later in the day I heard his loose slippers flip-flapping along the Bungalow verandah, and presently he stood in front of me, unsmiling but benevolent. When did I wish to go to Banteai Samrei? he enquired. He could arrange it. To-morrow morning at seven? Good . . . and off he slip-slapped into the darkness again.

Sure enough, punctually at seven o'clock next morning, as I was finishing my coffee, Hoa appeared to announce the arrival of my 'pousse': to which he presently consigned me, explaining in parenthesis that 'the pousse-coolie came from a village on the way to Banteai Samrei, and had a friend who had another friend who, he thought, might know someone who would show me how to get there'. It sounded a trifle vague. But at all events the 'pousse', with its home-painted, childish decorations, the '116' sprawling spiderwise across the paraffin-tin mudguard, and the gallant bicyclist in his odd, half-Western, half-Eastern rig-out: felt hat, khaki jacket, black shorts and red-and-white checked sarong, were old familiar friends. So in I climbed, bound for the unknown, equipped with a camera, a notebook, and a deplorably skimpy vocabulary of the Cambodian language.

We trundled off at a great pace in the cool morning air, along the new road that skirts the southern moat of the Wat, and then bears north and east, passing Sra Srang, a deliciously inviting sheet of greenish silver, reflecting the forest all round its margin. It may once have been the sacred bath of kings or priests; but now it is the very favourite bath of the people, and I have never passed it without seeing one or two performing their ablutions. To-

day a bather was wading far out towards the tiny island in the centre, where once stood a miniature temple; and the effect of the distant figure, with the water only reaching to its breast in that wide lake to all appearance fathoms deep, was curiously incongruous.

Beyond the mighty pyramid of Pre Rup, an old bullock-track turns off the road to the east; and here my brave bicyclist pulled up. The track was inches, if not feet, deep in hot, shifting sand. But there was a margin of rough grass on which for some little distance he rode, towing my trailer, refusing with most emphatic gestures to let me get out and walk. At last, however, he gave in. And together we ploughed along on foot, he lifting a hand from the handle-bars every few minutes to point ahead, presumably to encourage me.

So far the way was familiar. But we came presently to the village where the track to Banteai Srei and the Kulen range turns off at right angles to the north. Here my steed still pointed straight ahead to the east; and here, apparently, was his place of abode. Certainly he seemed very much at home. He pushed the bike and trailer through the deep dust into the compound enclosing one of the pitifully poor houses, among a medley of dogs and pigs, chickens and children, and left it there; disappearing himself (having, I imagined, been gathered into the bosom of his family), leaving me alone to deal with the entire population, both human and animal, who gathered round by degrees to inspect the queer stranger thus dropped into their midst.

It was hard to realize that a modern motor-road was almost within hail, so simple and unsophisticated were these poor folk. They appeared noiselessly, their bare feet making no sound in the soft dust, and stood without speaking at a respectful distance; gazing at me inquiringly, but not in the least rudely. Never have I felt so acutely the disability of lacking a language. For, unlike the people of most of the Asiatic races I have met, they made no attempt to communicate, and remained dumb in response to my halting attempts. If only (I thought to myself) these were a group of Japanese or Malay villagers instead of Cam-

bodians, what a soft chatter there would be, and what amusing stories I should hear! And with the thought, automatically I forgot that they were not, and began to explain my errand in Malay.

The effect was instantaneous. They can scarcely have understood; in any case the language in which they began to talk all at once, was quite unintelligible to me save for an odd word here and there; but the ice was broken, and we carried on an animated conversation, in Malay on my side and Cambodian on theirs, without in the least knowing what any of us were talking about, until my knight of the 'pousse' reappeared.

He evidently made the position clear, and explained my desire for a guide to show me the way to Banteai Samrei; for an old man detached himself from the rest, and signed to me to follow him. Off I set in his wake, thinking that all would now be plain sailing. But this new addition to the expedition was only an intermediary—doubtless the 'friend of a friend' of whom Hoa had spoken: and presently we stopped outside a tumble-down house on the farther outskirts of the village, where he vanished, to reappear chatting volubly with another stranger, the perfect model for a stage brigand. This apparition had coarse black hair standing straight on end, fierce eyes, and betel-stained mouth, and wore a piece of ragged black cotton draped from waist to knees as his sole costume. He, I gathered, was willing to act as guide; there followed the important matter of the bargain; and my pousse-coolie, who had constituted himself my personal courier, conducted the negotiations so skilfully that we actually came to terms for forty cents (about a shilling) the Cambodian numerals being among the items in my limited but practical vocabulary.

Now at last it seemed that we were really on the way to the not very distant, but well-concealed monastery; and our little procession of three set off in good earnest down the hot sandy track that follows the boundary line of the vanished Eastern Baray; the amiable brigand leading, myself following, and Ti the coolie bringing up the rear. I tried in vain to visualize this vague track, now a mere blurred succession of deep shapeless ruts in the soft sand

as the noble highway that once led to the eastern gate of Angkor Thom, beside the cool waters of the lake poetically described by Tchou Ta-Kuan. But such it certainly was; though where the shallow lake once rippled, the dry dusty rice-stubble now lies baking in the hot sunshine, in irregular patches which are re-planted at each wet monsoon. There is nothing to choose nowadays, between the lake side of the road and the other. On both, the untidy rice-patches sprawl anyhow among scrubby trees and rough grass-land; with, more rarely, a little garden and tobacco-patch and its well, beside the humble habitation of its owner. At one of these, the proprietor was evidently an acquaintance of my two native companions, who stopped for a friendly chat, in which, to judge by their gestures, the eccentric traveller in their charge was the principal theme. Curiosity thus satisfied, the natural pride of a cultivator in his crop came uppermost, and we were invited to inspect the strong, healthy plants with their big, smooth leaves, growing in a neat square of vivid green that shone like an emerald in its golden setting of sunburnt grass; and hospitality and business were nicely blended when our host produced the finished product, and made and presented me with a cigarette, which was at least a better smoke than most of the imported products to be bought in the Chinese shops—waving away all suggestion of payment with a lordly gesture of the hand. Ti, however, bought a handful (which he tied up carefully in a small grubby handkerchief embroidered with the letter 'P': a trophy he showed me with pride, but whose history I was unable to follow) for a copper cent.

A poverty-stricken land this may be; but it certainly cannot be accused of unfruitfulness. Wherever there is human habitation along the road, at the poorest hamlet or isolated dwelling, there Nature is triumphantly engaged in perpetuating every species of life. Brown human mothers stand suckling adorable brown babies; pariah bitches lying in the dust suckle families of nondescript pups; sows nourish broods of doglike piglings; skinny cats are surrounded by crawling, puny kittens—all in the middle of the track: and the picture is completed by the ragged hens

with their miserable chickens, that scratch and peck in the dust among the feet of the rest.

Our new friend the tobacco-farmer accompanied us for a time, until the road curved away from the 'lake' to climb a slight rise, and the rice-cultivation gave way to forest. The rough old bullock-cart track meandered on, as such tracks do, lacking entirely, to unaccustomed eyes, any landmarks whatsoever. But presently, though there was no sign of a path that I could see, our guide pointed to the right, and we plunged into the forest. It was soon evident that a path had once run this way, for though the undergrowth on each side would have been impenetrable without an axe, we could break our way fairly easily, creeping along through a dark green burrow, like the entrance to a giant rabbit-warren. All along, the kindly old brigand proved how entirely appearance may give the lie to character; for, wherever an awkward root or some other snag lay in wait to trip the unwary foot, there he would pull up and point out the hidden danger with a dust-begrimed big toe; so concerned was he for my damaged ankle. Which, though serviceable enough (thanks to the dancers' magic unguent), was still hideously swollen; and I fancy it was explained in detail to the populace of every hamlet through which we passed.

The expedition took on a more 'Alice in Wonderland' flavour than ever, when our low, leafy tunnel brought us straight to the entrance of a great, gloomy high-walled enclosure; and we climbed over the fallen stones of an immense ruined doorway into a courtyard where trees and ruins seemed to have divided the honours between them for so long that there was no longer any sign of conflict. They stood side by side in perfect harmony, sharing the beauty to which both contributed their part, as though the rich leaf-mould had nourished them equally, and they had grown up together through the green protecting coverlet of the thick undergrowth at their feet. The place was infinitely peaceful; and there was something about it that said more clearly than words that its silence was but seldom disturbed by human voices. Perhaps that was why, instinctively, one felt loth to break it now; and I noticed

that at first the two natives spoke in little more than whispers. Though they showed no signs of superstitious fear; and I am bound to confess that the influence, whatever it was, soon wore off, and after a while they were chatting away as cheerfully as ever.

Of the plan of Banteai Samrei, which has been described in detail by several skilled archæologists, I could make out little—nor, to be candid, had I any great desire to try. The appeal of the place lies in its 'excellent loneliness', and the harmonious blending of its galleries, walls and pillars with the forest, untouched (or almost so) by any attempt at clearing or restoration. Whether or not it was a monastery, it is certainly notable among the Angkor erections for a monastic restraint in the motifs of its decoration. The one figure that in all the other buildings reigns unchallenged and supreme—the Apsaras or celestial dancer—is here conspicuously absent; and search as I might, not one single smiling feminine figure could I find hiding in any dark corner. There were only numbers of jolly, well-nourished little men, sitting cross-legged in elaborately carved frames, bearing a distinct resemblance to the monkeys that played all round them, or stopped now and then to stare curiously at the unusual phenomenon of strangers in their private preserve.

But though the usual dainty little ladies were missing, there was no lack of other decoration. 'False doors' like the best of our mediæval European woodwork, were carved as finely as any at Angkor Wat; and on the lintels and pilasters of the doorways, some of the delicate foliated patterns were still as sharp-edged and fresh, despite their long centuries of exposure to tropic storms and sunshine, as though the sculptor's chisel had left them only yesterday. A strange, dark, melancholy cloister: the perfect prototype of every 'monks' walk' that ever figured in our Western ghost-stories—ran round the inner courtyard, turning blank walls to the world outside, the only light that penetrated its gloom having to creep between the close-set colonnades of windows looking inward on the court. Needless to say, no fervour of decoration had spent itself

They, doubtless, were designed to regale the ever-flowing stream of pious pilgrims, or even to entertain the populace. But these æsthetically bare walls offered no distractions to minds more properly engaged in monkish meditation; and even to the ordinary traveller, unversed in the intricacies of archæology, this part of Banteai Samrei alone would seem to prove the monastic hypothesis a correct one.

I explored the place alone; and returned to find my two companions making cigarettes of the newly acquired tobacco by wrapping it in green leaves—lighting them with the flint-and-steel that every eastern native carries. They offered me one, which I could hardly be so churlish as to refuse; and it was not at all unpleasant. We were an odd little party as we sat there, in the shade of a tower so swathed in creepers that only a projecting carved pinnacle distinguished it from the surrounding trees—I in an embrasured window whence most of the finely turned columns had fallen and lay at my feet, where my companions squatted in tireless native fashion, on their heels. Perhaps the tobacco exerted its usual socializing influence; or perhaps the two Cambodians felt it incumbent upon them, as virtually my hosts in this strange place, to entertain me with polite conversation for presently all three of us began to cast about for means to overcome the barriers of language.

It was the camera that first broke the ice. All hands helped eagerly with the adjustment of the tripod; and when it came to changing a film, there was an opportunity to look through the shutter and 'see the wheels go round'; after which communication seemed to be established, and we proceeded to improve the occasion by adding to our respective vocabularies. First we indicated the more salient portions of the human frame, my genial hosts telling me the Cambodian names, which I wrote down phonetically; and I, the English, which they repeated, and to my surprise remembered, at least till the end of our return journey. There followed the names of the trees, the stones, the carvings, and a score of other such things: all of which, thus jotted down, I found later to tally fairly well with the

But this kind of conversation began to pall as the ice thawed further (and all ghostly influences of our surroundings were forgotten in the new game); and the native mind began to turn to the subject nearly always uppermost in it—that of prices and money. Pointing to my wrist-watch, and taking out a few small coins that he carried wrapped in a piece of rag, Ti enquired (in language that I first interpreted as a desire to buy!) how much the watch had cost. It was then, weary of the limitations of words, that I hit upon the plan of making little drawings in my note-book to illustrate my meaning. I am no artist. But what could be easier than to draw a little figure in half a dozen rough lines, offering a clock-face to another little figure, to indicate that the watch was a present? My audience was delighted: so much so that the game went on until pages were covered with ridiculous scrawls, and we knew almost enough of the minutiæ of each other's family history to satisfy an Immigration Authority. It was I who tired first. I am no artist, as I said; and although my success with my 'public' was almost embarrassingly gratifying, the strain of attempting to introduce some variety into my absurd productions was fast growing beyond endurance. Furthermore, hunger, and the prospect of the long, hot, homeward walk were factors that began to demand consideration. Besides, I felt it would be a thousand pities to jeopardize the one and only artistic success of a lifetime for lack of capacity to keep it up. So (not without a pang, such as might be experienced by a virtuoso refusing an encore) I put book and pen away, rose from my seat, and pointed towards the ruined doorway. My art-patrons rose too: with an alacrity that set me wondering whether after all their apparent delight had not been mere characteristic Oriental politeness? And we crept through the outer wall to find that in less than a dozen paces the forest had closed again over the old monastery, leaving as little sign as though it had sunk into the earth.

If by any chance we had wanted to reach Angkor again, unobserved, we should have had no slightest chance of it, even in that sparsely populated region. For at every hamlet we passed through, the inhabitants were

evidently on the look-out for us, and our homeward progress was punctuated by social gatherings impossible to avoid. The friendly relations now established between the brigand, the bicyclist and myself must have been infectious; for the peasants had lost all their shyness, and gathered closely round, the women holding out brown naked babies to be admired, and proving themselves truly feminine (despite the fact that their own latest fashions were nothing more than nondescript black draperies hanging haphazard from the waist downwards) by pressing up to me to finger the material of my faded five- or six-year-old washing frock; nodding their heads in such evident approval that I should have liked to tear it off and give it to each of them!

A snake-skin belt I was wearing also seemed to interest them greatly; and the fact that it was worn loosely round my middle as a mere adjunct, without fulfilling a belt's proper function of keeping some garment or other safely in its place, intrigued them still more; and not one of them but carefully 'took in the slack', as though helpfully showing me what the thing was really intended for! From the native point of view, a belt is worn to secure sarong, sampot, shorts, or trousers, as the case may be, or as a convenient means of carrying knife or pouch; otherwise, why wear it? And their gestures may also very likely have meant that if I had no more practical use for it, I might just as well give it to someone who had.

Standing there, surrounded by these simple people, all obviously waiting for me to do or say something, was exactly like being host at a children's party, expected to entertain, but without any paraphernalia, and worse still, lacking even language in which to do it. Ti and the Brigand were looking at me anxiously: the Producer, Manager, and Advance Press, as it were, of the show, making signs to me to draw some more 'pictures'; but I was painfully conscious that both pen and inspiration had run dry. Luckily, however, the belt's popularity gave me an idea. Pointing to it, and stooping down, I drew a big wriggling serpent with gaping jaws in the soft sand (for these

and then, wielding the murderous-looking knife worn in the Brigand's belt, proceeded in dumb show to skin the monster, and encircle my waist with the result: all of which (the audience being happily less critical than the very youngest children of the West) was followed with rapt attention, and the finale greeted with shouts of laughter. After that all was easy. For repetitions of the same feeble performance were insisted upon by my 'management' at each group of habitations we came to, and all met with the same uncritical reception.

At all these hamlets there were a few stunted coco-nut palms in every dusty compound; and as by this time we were hot and thirsty, I signed to Ti to ask if the owners would sell us some nuts (whose 'milk', drunk direct from the green shell, is always cool on the hottest day). Greatly to my surprise, in view of the prevailing friendly atmosphere, he met with what I took to be a refusal at one after another of our halting-places, even, sometimes, after a start had been made to climb a tree. It was not until his negotiations were at last successful, in his own home village, that I managed to understand his explanation. It seemed that all the others had demanded five cents (about a penny farthing) per coco-nut, whereas the proper market price was three: which goes to prove on how pitifully fine a margin the commercial transactions of the very poor are conducted. (For this was Ti's 'treat'; he waved away my offers to pay, at the time, though, naturally, he got it back with interest later.) And there were evidently conditions attached even to the final, successful sale; for I noticed that after long argument, it was Ti, and not the vendor, who went off to fetch a wicked-looking, long-handled knife, and a big kapok-branch—which, with its neatly-spaced right-angle shoots chopped off, made an ideal natural ladder—to climb the scrubby palm and cut the great green nuts from which we afterwards drank: the first being handed to me with much ceremony.

At last Ti fetched bike and pousse from where he had left them, and we—or rather I—took our final leave. The Brigand, who had accompanied us all the way back, so overwhelmed me with gratitude for his forty cents, that

I added another ten for luck, bringing his total fee up to a little less than a shilling. Whereupon he shook my hand warmly with both his own: as did also several others of the older men—the heads, I fancy, of the village communities. But the women drew back respectfully, as though smitten all in a moment with the true Eastern sense of the inferiority of their sex.

Ti mounted, and I climbed in; and we bumped off, along the rough grass margin of the track, with a dozen or so naked children, till then inconspicuous, shouting excitedly in our wake. Then, in no time, as it seemed, we were back again on the smooth motor road, and the adventure was over. Ti was pedalling swiftly and easily back into the twentieth century, past Pre Rup, Sra Srang, and the Great Wat, shimmering in the heat-haze in the distance: survivals, all of them, like the poor folk we had just left, of a forgotten age; and as little affected or disturbed as they by the storms and stress and 'progress' of the new world around them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

'DRY BONES' AND CAMEOS

There is something in the atmosphere of the whole Angkor region that prevents even the most learned of its students from falling into the error of mere academic research; something which fills them with an insatiable desire to pierce the veil and bring to life again in imagination, as truly as may be, something of the splendid vanished past, and to clothe with colourful flesh the still beautiful dry bones that remain.

Happily, though the ascertained facts are so meagre, there is abundance of queer, isolated scraps of description and information scattered haphazard here and there, like the handfuls of coloured paper in a paper-chase. You will find them in the flowery language of the inscriptions on stone; in Chinese, Indian, Siamese, and Arab records; in the carved galleries of Angkor Wat, the Bayon, and Banteai Chhmar, with their tens of thousands of feet of 'film' depicting the life of a vanished people; in the Memoir of Tchou Ta-Kuan; in native traditions; and in the present-day manners and customs of the country, many of which research has proved to be faithful mirrors to the past. They do not make 'history'; but they provide hundreds of tiny tantalizing glimpses, disconnected as a collection of snapshots thrown higgledy-piggledy into a drawer, from which you can pick at random: each one revealing some vivid scene, isolated and often irrelevant; but serving none the less, for a fleeting moment, to bring the dead past to life again.

One of the earliest of these scenes is that of a Chinese ambassador's visit in A.D. 607 to the court of the Thai king reigning over the territory that now is Siam, and was then a protectorate of the Khmer Empire, much as the Cambodian kingdom is of France to-day.[1] It might have come straight out of the '*Arabian Nights*'. The king sent

[1] *Le Siam Ancien*, Fournereau. (Annales du Musée Guimet: Nos. 27 and 31.)

thirty ships to meet the visitors, and a chain of gold to moor their ship; on landing they were greeted by the king's son, who presented them with priceless presents and vessels of gold, and an immense golden platter was proffered on which to lay the letters from the Chinese emperor. Two elephants with howdahs shaded by peacocks' feathers carried the ambassador and his suite to the palace, accompanied by a magnificent procession. After the letters had been presented, to the strains of music, the embassy was escorted to a residence assigned by the king, and served by his attendants. Later they were bidden to a banquet at which more than a hundred dishes were served. The king's son accompanied the ambassador back to China, bearing his father's reply written on sheets of pure gold, veined to imitate the usual palm-leaf parchment.[1]

By way of contrast, this sumptuous scene might be followed by that in any of the Brahman temples on the occasion of one of the oft-recurring feasts. According to Barth, every kind of animal was sacrificed at such times, as a regular part of the ritual, and also, probably by no means infrequently, man. Whatever the victim, it could not have been a pretty sight, for no doubt, as in many parts of India to-day, the worshippers did not feel that they had shown a proper degree of piety unless they dabbled their hands and besprinkled themselves with the blood of the sacrificial offering.

From such gruesome pictures one might turn for refreshment to the cool, tree-shaded sheets of water in the stone-walled basins which the Khmers, being as practical as they were artistic, constructed through the length and breadth of their territory for the conservation of water in the dry season. All along the hundreds of miles of raised highways, over whose foundations many of the modern ones have been built, the ruins of these reservoirs are

[1] These Thais, who were Buddhists, but had many Brahmans at their court, were the ancestors of the Siamese. There is some confusion over the name 'Thai', which means 'free'. The Siamese themselves say they took the name when they freed themselves from the yoke of the Khmers. But actually it was the title of a large group of peoples of which the Siamese are one. The Shans also belong to it.

found, close to the remains of small buildings: doubtless the travellers' resthouses described by Tchou Ta-Kuan; or else small temples to ensure the protection of the gods, the resthouses themselves having been of more perishable material. Transport in those days would have been by elephant or bullock cart, so that stables and fodder-sheds must have been in the picture, as well as ricefields close by; but there is nothing to tell us whether the entertainment provided at these vanished hostelries for the elephant caravans that came proudly swinging along the crest of the highway was as sumptuous as that in the modern rest-bungalows and hotels that have taken their place.

Travelling along these ancient roads, another picture of their indefatigable builders comes to mind. Wherever a river is crossed by one of the Khmers' massive stone bridges, you will always notice a sudden and manifestly artificial widening of the river-bed; and in fancy you can see, almost as clearly as though they were there in the flesh, gangs of slaves digging away the banks on either side to make room for enough narrow openings between the enormous piles, to let the flood-water through in the wet season: experience having no doubt proved that tropic floods are no respecters of the most solid bridges unless the water is allowed free passage. The result is that all these old bridges are nearly twice as long as the normal width of the streams.

There are pictures without end of the Tonlé Sap, or Great Lake, and the streams that feed it, almost choked with fish, after the annual floods. Sometimes small oily fish were so thick that it was difficult to get the oars into the water; and at the great annual fishing hundreds of men pulling at a long net between them, dragged in enormous catches to the accompaniment of a deafening tattoo of drums. This annual harvest of fish still goes on, as it well may have done ever since the Indo-Chinese peninsula was inhabited; and when the water runs off after the wet season, leaving only a few inches instead of a depth of thirty feet or more, temporary villages built on stilts spring up all over the bed of the lake, and thousands of shallow-draught boats appear, manned not only by Cambodians,

but by Chinese, Annamite, Malay, and other fishermen, who flock here for the three months' season.

Another and more brilliant waterscape scene was that of the Feast of the Waters, held at the full moon when the floods were at their height. The celebrations went on for a week, all sorts of sports being held in the presence of the king in his royal junk, shaded by a gorgeous parasol and surrounded by palace ladies waving peacock-feather fans. The banks were lined with other craft, filled with notabilities. At Angkor these fêtes probably took place on the Western Baray, which was then surrounded by wide boulevards, and stretched westward to its present boundary from near the city wall. Nowadays the custom lives on in the sports held on the Mékong at Phnom Penh at the same time of year.

There is a tendency to think of the Khmers only as a nation of slaves, pressed into the service of a fabulously wealthy priesthood and aristocracy. But at least some of their kings knew the meaning of humanity. One issued a decree that 'all the orphans, the sick and destitute among the common people are to be cared for, and given food, medicine, and all necessaries'. Another granted remission of taxes to the inhabitants of a poor region, adding that all offenders would be freely pardoned except those who had been guilty of cruelty to any living creature; these would be punished without mercy. There are many records of the construction of reservoirs to enable the people to cultivate crops. And there was the great twelfth-century king Jayavarman, who founded over a hundred hospitals in all parts of his realm, and concerning whom the noble tribute was engraved in stone that 'he felt the sickness of his people more than his own, for it is the public sorrow that is the sorrow of a king' . . . a pleasant memory to come echoing down the centuries.

The Angkor carvings illustrate a variety of jewels, garments, head-dresses, fans, and every other kind of purchasable gew-gaw that would fill a modern multiple-store catalogue to overflowing; and that there were shops galore for the sale of all these things inside the walls of Angkor Thom is very certain. 'The manager of the central

store' is mentioned in one inscription, and rather suggests some sort of Angkorean Harrods or Selfridges, ruled over by an unctious, silk-robed, Oriental edition of Big Business: a nasty, oily fellow, probably, open to all manner of bribery and corruption. But here, as in all Eastern cities, there must have been plenty of less pretentious shops than that: streets and streets of them, full of tempting, fascinating things, like those irresistible shops in High Street, Singapore, to-day, whose shabby exterior so oddly belies the treasures within. And just as the rickshaws discharge their passengers at those unpretentious doors, so no doubt in Angkor the sedan-chairs must have brought an endless stream of customers along the vanished streets where now grows the silent, splendid forest. I often wonder whether the one blue sapphire that was dug up a few years ago was part of the stock of one of those gem merchants, so familiar to every resident of the Far East, who delight to exhibit their treasures, picking them up reverently with tweezers, one by one from their tiny nests of cotton-wool?

Descriptions of the 'great markets' of old Cambodia are to be found in Chinese records from the fifth century onwards, and would apply almost equally well to the markets held in Cambodian towns to-day; except that in the fifth century 'foreign merchants came to them in great numbers', which is true of them no longer. In one particular, especially, they are unchanged; then, as now, it was the women who played the leading part as vendors, and bygone travellers' records are borne out by a wall-carving which shows a lifelike little figure squatting beside her low stall. Perhaps it was this unfeminine passion for the commercial life which (as in our own times) destroyed all taste for the more domestic arts, and so accounted for some acid Chinese criticisms of thirteenth-century Khmer ladies! The modern Cambodian woman takes the lead commercially also in other directions: it is she who almost invariably elects to 'deal' with the conservator of the Phnom Penh museum for any specimens that may have been found.

That Khmer literature was not confined to the specimens on stone which have come down to us, we know from the many pictures in their wall-carvings of figures reading

from books open upon their knees; as well as from Tchou Ta-Kuan's observation that they had 'many volumes written in black on palm-leaf, and very neatly folded' (a fact he noted with interest, doubtless, because the Chinese had used paper since the first century A.D. and printing from a few centuries later). Ancient Cambodian students, however, like the modern Western school child, wrote with chalk on a black surface. A ninth-century inscription includes in a list of goods provided for a monastery, 'empty sheets for writing and chalk for the use of students'; and still, in the Cambodian bonzeries, the monks make writing-material by boiling the bark of a kind of mulberry-tree to a pulp, rolling it out very thin, and drying it in the sun; they then dye it black and write on it with chalk.[1] Palm-leaf 'paper', as described by Tchou Ta-Kuan, is also still made in the bonzeries, highly polished, and written on with a metal point, after which a black composition of charcoal and resin, resembling Indian ink, is painted over it and rubbed off the polished surface when dry.[2] The reference to the gold sheets, veined to resemble palm-leaf, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, suggest that the same methods were in vogue in the seventh century—and for how many more centuries before that, in the unchanging East, who can say?

Among all the thousands of carved pictures only one has been found showing the Khmer builders at work, and that not a very illuminating one. But though the riddles of their amazing technique remain unanswered, the quarries that were the scene of so much of their labour yield vivid glimpses of them in imagination, at work beside the great blocks of stone left only partly cut out of the living mountain side. The foot-hills of the Kulen range, about forty miles north-east of Angkor, contain miles of quarries abounding in signs of human activity, and cavities whence the cleanly cut blocks have been removed looking as fresh as though they had been quarried yesterday. A

[1] A similar material, called 'Tapa', is made and dyed in various colours by the natives of some of the South Pacific islands. It was formerly used for clothing; but now mostly for decorative purposes.

[2] G. Groslier, *Récherches sur les Cambodgiens*. (Challamel, Paris.)

raised road, of which traces remain, connected these quarries with Angkor: and along it, somehow or other, must have been transported the thousands upon thousands of tons of stone that went into the buildings of the region. Unless (as has always seemed to me possible, though the theory is regarded as unorthodox) there may have been canals fed by the Siem Réap River. A people capable of such gigantic engineering feats as the Khmers, the diversion of rivers and other elaborate waterworks among them, would surely have been the first to think of such a means of facilitating transport?

Material for their enterprises was ready to their hand. Cambodia abounds in stone: both sandstone of all kinds and colours, and the ferruginous stone known as laterite or limonite which forms the foundation of all the Khmer buildings. The native name for it is 'bien-hoa', and it is also often called 'bai-kriem', meaning grilled rice, which it rather resembles in appearance. The native name for sandstone—'thma-phoc,' or 'mud-stone'—embodies their belief that the ancient temples were all built up in a soft state like clay, and afterwards modelled, by the celestial architect Prah Pus Nuca, under the orders of the god Indra.

Whether that was so or not, there must have been some odd scenes when the builders were at work. M. Groslier came across in the possession of one of the king's architects at Phnom Penh a curious manuscript which had been copied from a very ancient one by the grandfather of its present possessor, who said it had been the accepted book of rules and regulations for all carpenters employed. Among a host of other queer instructions, they were enjoined always to 'ask the benediction of the Queen of the Earth'; and to remember that 'from February to May the influence of Indra comes from the east, from May to August from the south, August to November from the west, and November to February from the north'. A long list of elaborate measurements and plans to be used in different kinds of buildings was quoted as 'most excellent, because thus all the gods give protection, happiness, and long life'. Holes for the insertion of columns must be triangular, which would bring luck to the building. Round or square holes

would bring it ill fortune. Propitiatory formulae—given at length—must be recited both when digging out the earth and inserting the column; and offerings of different precious metals according to the point of the compass, must be buried under each. A recipe for a luck-bringing mixture for anointing the bases of columns contained honey, gold, various fruits and essences, and pollen of the lotus. When working on a building a different god must be propitiated with the appropriate sacrifice on each day of the week. Some, being Demons, demanded raw meat; a child-god must have sugar-cane and little cakes; an ox-god, fresh grass, and so on through a long list. There can be little doubt that such customs as these, in use a few generations ago, were handed down from very ancient times, and they do much to add colour to our attempts to reconstruct the building-scenes of Angkor.

There must have been a hue and cry now and then, when some bold spirit dared to encroach upon the space—always square or rectangular—designed to receive a temple. It was customary to mark the angles of these with large inscribed upright stones; and any encroachment on these 'claims' was severely punished. An inscription records one such offender having received 102 strokes of the whip, and that another was heavily fined.

Several pictures of life in old Angkor are suggested by the four closely engraved sides of the huge square stone that stands in one of the ruined galleries of Ta Prohm. Among other things they record exact particulars of the immense personnel that once filled the splendid temple of which the giant trees now have undisputed possession. The list includes: '2,740 persons to officiate; 2,232 assistants, of whom 615 are dancing-women; 12,640 persons with the right of board and lodging; altogether 66,625 men and women here serve the gods.'[1] A strange picture to contemplate, indeed, as you stand in this ruined court, hemmed in by towering tree-trunks, where only the cries of monkeys and the whirr of insects disturb the forest silence.

A glimpse of how these myriads of 'hangers-on' were

[1] Groslier, *Récherches sur les Cambodgiens*. (Challamel, Paris.)

NATURE ASSERTS HERSELF

Loveliest of all the trees at Angkor is one that has sprung from a seed dropped on the crown of the tiny temple of Neak Pean. The roots form natural arches over each doorway: and above the trunk branches out umbrella-wise to form a wide, perfectly symmetrical canopy

provided for is given by an inscription which mentions in a list of their rations: 'a remedy for toothache; a faggot of firewood; and a casket to contain a fire, to be used with care for four months.'

As regards proper temple manners, another inscription supplies the rules. 'Only the king and the priests may wear their ornaments on entering. Others must wear a modest costume and no jewels or even flowers. They must not eat, or chew betel'; (a more than wise precaution!) 'no one will be allowed to enter whose conduct is not irreproachable. When passing a temple, all, except the king, must alight and walk, not shaded by a parasol—but strangers are exempt from this rule.'

An odd little picture is that of the temple gods as they must have appeared at night, by the light of the flaring torches, carefully shrouded in mosquito-netting; for the recorded gifts to one temple include 'forty-five veils from China, to stretch over the divinities, because of mosquitoes'. These divinities, according to many inscriptions, were 'loaded with jewels'; vanished as completely now as the veils that covered them—looted, no doubt, when Angkor was sacked by the conquering Chams or Siamese; for why expect better of them than of the 'civilized' Europeans who in our own times looted the treasures of Pekin?

A series of eight inscriptions engraved at the entrance of the Royal Palace at Angkor Thom suggest something of the size and importance of the realm of which this was the centre. They record the oaths of allegiance of four hundred shires or districts, signed with the full name of the ruler of each. But who the king, and where the districts, no one now can say.

In our fast-changing world, the days of Cambodia's first discovery by the Europeans seem to be divided from us by almost as great a gulf as those of the Khmers. Certainly 'le gentleman Khmer', as the French missionary Bouillevaux saw and described him in 1850, has vanished as completely as King Yarcovarman, and the picture of him is well worth preserving. 'You see him with his hair brushed proudly back, in his handsome silk langouti and little coat with golden buttons; his cortège of slaves

carrying the parasol that is the symbol of his dignity, his fan, his cigarettes, and his boxes of betel- and areca-nut; when he travels by boat he is shaded by screens of peacocks' feathers, and peals of tiny bells tinkle harmoniously with each stroke of the oars; the figure of a Dragon is carved on the vessel, or else painted in brilliant colours. . . .'[1] To-day he travels in a French motor car; and all that remain of his former paraphernalia are the cigarettes. In those days, too, as you travelled up the river, you might sometimes meet a boat whose principal passenger was a statue of the Buddha, shaded by a white, many-tiered umbrella, on his way to the temple to which he had been presented by the King or some highly placed official: exactly, no doubt, as divinities have travelled to the Khmer temples all through their history.

The first impact of West on East produced some odd effects. Once the Protectorate was established in Cambodia, French merchants soon came hurrying up the Mékong to exploit the rich new market, and above all, the wealthy, unsophisticated young King Norodom, thrilled to the marrow with all the unheard-of novelties they had to offer. So it came about that the dignified Governor-General de Vilérs, bidden by His Majesty to an Audience of State, was graciously invited to be seated on a chair which immediately burst into the opening bars of a popular French chanson of the day.[2] The monarch was both pained and surprised when the indignant Governor bounced out of the Palace demanding instant and abject apologies . . . some people, the young king mournfully reflected, have no sense of humour, even for a joke manufactured by their own countrymen.

A genuine effort to make the dry bones live was made by King Sisowath in 1921, on the occasion of a visit from Maréchal Joffre and Lord Northcliffe to Angkor Wat. The scene for weeks beforehand must have resembled closely those of the recurrent migrations and establishment of royal residences to which the bygone kings were so addicted; for a huge temporary palace inside a double

[1] *L'Annam et le Cambodge*, Bouillevaux. (V. Palmé, Paris.)
[2] P. Collard, *Cambodge et Cambodgiens*. (Challamel, Paris.)

enclosure, on the traditional plan, was built for the King opposite the western moat of the Wat; and beyond, a whole town to accommodate the populace who came in hundreds from all over the country, summoned by the primitive 'wireless' that only such people know. The elements of the pageant were the traditional ones: elephants, horses, palanquins, parasols, orchestras of curious instruments, strange arms and accoutrements, and glittering costumes. The King, sitting cross-legged and motionless in the traditional attitude of the Khmer kings, was carried in his golden palanquin in a State procession through the Elephant portals and all round the precincts of the temple, attended by his eight many-tiered umbrellas, and made offerings to the gods in the cruciform court according to the ancient ritual, while the royal dancers brought golden dishes filled with fruits, and waved lamps in a haze of perfumed vapours. At night the smoke curled up from countless torches, illuminating excited, ever-moving crowds; and had it not been that the glitter of electric bulbs shone through the soft glow of the torchlight, and that motor cars threaded their way now and then among the crowds and the elephants, it might almost have been one of old Tchou Ta-Kuan's descriptions come to life: especially when the Resident distributed some 2,000 portions of rice daily to the poor, like a reincarnation of King Jayavarman. . . . Almost . . . but not quite. It was a brave attempt; but at best it was bound to be but a tawdry parody of the gorgeous pageants of other days, whose ghosts, perhaps, looked on at it with pitying smiles. For the truth cannot be gainsaid: the glory has departed; and no gilt and tinsel can ever bring it back to life again. The only fabric rich enough to do it is imagination—the stuff that dreams are made of. And that is at the disposal of anyone who cares to study Cambodia's romantic, colourful chapter of history.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

BIG TREES . . . AND FAREWELL

The whole of the Angkor district is a giants' playground. Everything about it, whether the work of art or of Nature, is designed on the grand scale. But, for some obscure reason known only to themselves (or more likely with a godlike disregard for any reason at all) the giants of the jungle—the 'Green Gods', as the natives sometimes call them—have chosen one especial corner in which to rear their sturdiest children. And amid the fallen splendours of old Ta Prohm, 'the Ancestor of Brahma,' there is a congregation of trees so huge as to seem the fantastic creation of a dream; trees whose bulk looms beside you and towers aloft, massive as a lighthouse, with blank, windowless, pale-grey walls that seem to be hiding dreadful secrets. The tops of their enormous buttressed roots slant out from the immense column of the trunk farther above your head than the roof of a tall house, to form triangular partitions, smooth and even as though built of concrete, between a series of spacious, roofless 'cubicles', set round the base of the tree; while the roots themselves, thick as a horse's body, twist silently and horribly away, across courtyards nobly roofed by the giants' own leafy branches, or under causeways whose stones they burst asunder like eggshells, till they reach the shadows of the ruined towers, and writhe their way through the darkness down the whole length of long galleries, to find their way out at last through breaches in the wall, to rejoin their kindred in the forest beyond.

I have sometimes tried to follow, stumbling along for hundreds of feet in the darkness beside the clumsy bulk of one of these nightmare root-serpents, in an attempt to gauge their length, only to be baulked at last when it burrowed under some fallen mass of masonry, or forced its way through a wall whose other side I sought in vain in that bewildering labyrinth of life and death—of ruined

architecture and triumphant trees. In one court-yard, where a cruciform terrace adorned with Naga balustrades leads to a great doorway guarded by stone sentinels, from which dark, pillared galleries disappear into the shadows on either side, almost the whole ground space is crowded with these tower-like, buttressed monsters. One staunch stone guardian still stands beside the doorway, his hands folded on his weapon, hemmed in among these merciless enemies, grimly facing the certainty that in the awful fulness of time, even if it takes centuries, he too will be overthrown, and lie with his fellow-sentinels, and many of the Nagas, humbled and defeated at their cruel conquerors' feet. But though their backs may be broken, there are many Nagas (mindful, perhaps, of their divine origin) who still dare to rear a proud, sevenfold head in tragic, hopeless defiance, above the ruins of the lovely terrace through whose flags the giant roots have forced their way with such contemptuous ease; and the causeway that trails brokenly in the spaces between the majestic trunks and their terrible sprawling roots, like a beautiful garment, worn out and thrown aside to be trampled out of existence.

Ta Prohm lies to the east of Angkor Thom, with its northern wall running parallel to the southern boundary of the great artificial reservoir which once gave the city part of its water supply. It was at Ta-Prohm that one of the latest-dated inscriptions yet found was discovered; but it contained no reliable record of the great group's erection, nor any but the vaguest clues. It therefore remains one of the most profound of Angkor's mysteries, leaving historians to theorize as they will. It is a vast maze of inter-communicating galleries, terraces, courtyards, and temples; and of so many huge towers at different elevations, that two generations of study have failed to agree upon their number. It is enclosed, like Angkor Thom, with an immense rectangular stone wall, pierced in the middle of each side by an entrance surmounted with a gigantic four-faced human head, wearing a necklace formed of the figures of priests absorbed in religious adoration. Here, however, it is the wall of the inner enclosure, not the outer, that is surrounded by a moat. This is still full of water, and so

thickly overhung with trees that no ray of sunshine ever reaches it to lighten the mysterious green gloom.

Ta Prohm has an enchantment all its own, shared only—though for some intangible reason, to a less extent—by its neighbour, Prah Kahn. These two alone, of the bigger groups of buildings in the immediate vicinity of Angkor, are still left, for weal or woe, in the grip of the forest; and the rich covering of growth that veils the welter of destruction to which vandal conquerors and centuries of tropic weather have reduced them, has not been stripped away, as in the case of the Bayon and others, and their bones laid bare to the crude light of day. The paths by which the first explorers hacked their way in have been cleared, and the further advance of the forest checked; but the matchless temple built by Nature into the very fabric of that erected by man, has been left undisturbed under its canopy of mighty branches.

Conscientious archæologists have worked out something approximate to the original plan of the vast place, but the ordinary visitor, once inside the second enclosure, is as completely lost as a child in a maze. It is impossible to go more than a few yards straight ahead in any direction. One moment you are climbing over a tumbled pile of fallen stones, treading unwillingly upon delicately carved mouldings that might have been copied from the very leaves of the creepers that twine about them; the next you are stooping to crëep along what once was a lofty gallery, emerging to find yourself on the roof-level of another, choked yards deep with the ruins of a fallen tower. Or you find yourself in an enclosed space surrounded with walls so intricately carved as to look like the finest repoussée, with scarcely a sign of wear and tear, though a fringe of ferns and orchids hangs over their summit, from which all vestige of a roof has vanished.

The strange, haunted charm of the place entwines itself about you as you go, as inescapably as the roots have wound themselves about the walls and towers. You climb up and down and round and round, with no sense of plan or direction, stifling little stabs of panic now and then, as you follow pads a few inches wide made by the prowling

night-hunters of the jungle; through pitch darkness and weird greenish shadow into which an occasional ray of sunshine filters like a spotlight, and where you have often the odd illusion of being under water. Exploring here, exploring there, lured now by a tantalizing vista seen between the slender turned columns of a window; now by a distant point of pale green light at the end of a long black tunnel under huge blocks of fallen masonry jammed in the roof-place of a gallery. On and on, ever alert for surprises, finding new beauties at every turn in this strange medley of death and resurrection, where living pillars spring from the foundations of those that have fallen.

At your feet, in a drift of red and golden leaves, is a miracle of carven stone, on which dancing-girls, dainty as wind-fairies, are whirling and twirling amid a wild mêlée of chariot wheels and rearing horses, melting into a delicate frieze of lotus-blossoms—all as fresh as though they had been chiselled yesterday. You clamber through windows, pulling yourself up by a grip on the interwoven foliage that frames them: where it is only a sense of touch in the green dimness that tells you whether it is carved in stone or a living creeper. You worm your way under arches formed of bloated, writhing roots, clutching broken columns in their octopus grasp, and climb up the slope of a carved pillar leaning steeply against a jagged break in the wall, knotted into place with roots, as though by a primitive scaffolding—to emerge on the cornice of a doorway, where centuries of fallen leaves have formed a deep, rich mould, and have buried the ruins below in a grave over which Nature, as though repentant of her destructive cruelty, has spread a carpet of grass and scattered trails of scented blossoms.

Everywhere around you, you see Nature in this dual rôle of destroyer and consoler: strangling on the one hand, and healing on the other; no sooner splitting the carved stones asunder than she dresses their wounds with cool, velvety mosses, and binds them with her most delicate tendrils: a conflict of moods so contradictory and feminine as to prove once more—if proof were needed—how well 'Dame' Nature merits her feminine title!

Strangest of all the incredibly strange sights in this magician's palace of fantasy is a small inner court, where, from the roof of the surrounding gallery, there descends a mighty cascade, blanched by the dim light to a ghastly pallor, of roots many times thicker than the massive columns that stand behind and between them, sharing with the forest invaders the double labour of supporting the gallery and the smooth, tremendous trunk that rises lance-straight from its roof-ridge, to vanish into the green tangle far above, like a cathedral spire into the sky. Younger offshoots of these monster roots—mere tendrils of fifty years old or so—curl suavely about the columns, impartial as to whether these are of stone or of their own parent growth; others, slenderer still, wriggle themselves into patterns to frame a lovely lady with naughtily downcast eyes, hiding coyly in a corner; and showers of leaves and curving tendrils drape the clean, gracious outlines of doorways and window-spaces, as though trying to veil the jumble of ruin inside. And everywhere—wherever they have found room for their far-flung buttresses—the great trees stand, filling every space among the towers and galleries and broken balustrades; and wherever you look upwards you can see their huge glimmering white trunks, soaring aloft until they are lost in a mistiness of pale green, speckled by the sunshine into more shades than any artist ever dreamed of.

The gods of these old haunted places are jealous gods, and keep their choicest delights for the solitary who pays them the homage of undivided attention. If you sit very still in the shadows, you will presently find that the court-yard you had thought so empty is peopled with little grey men. They follow each other silently across the cracked flagstones, along the crests of the walls and the ridges of the roofs, through the speckled shadows and sunshine, and then drop one by one down to the terrace below; they run past the solemn stone sentinel, in through the great doorway, and stand peering out, their hands shading their eyes, from behind pillars and through windows that are squares of darkness; ghosts, surely, to your startled imagination the first time you see them—until you realize that they

A sinister cascade of enormous roots, blanched by the dim light, sprawls down like the arms of a nightmare octopus over the roof of a gallery at Ta Prohm

The trunks of giant trees, dwarfing the pillars of galleries as high as the aisle of a cathedral

are only harmless little grey monkeys. But tourist parties need have no fear that their nerves will be disturbed by such visitations. These ghosts keep well out of the way, aloft in the branches, so long as voices are to be heard below.

The monkeys are not always silent. Sometimes they will chase each other with strange pathetic cries, swinging from branch to branch out of sight above you, sending leaves fluttering down softly as snowflakes at your feet. The music of bird-notes is everywhere, rising above an harmonious orchestra of humming insects. Then, quite suddenly, it will all cease, and there is silence: in the midst of which, presently, a tokek's melancholy call echoes weirdly; and when he ceases, with his characteristic weary sigh, the bell-bird's queer, monotonous, reiterated note rings out alone in the stillness for so long that it is a relief when, as suddenly as it stopped, the chorus breaks out again, rising and rising in a gradual crescendo, led by the cicadas, till it is almost deafening; to stop, and start, and stop again, over and over and over again, in a rhythm as tireless and unchanging as time itself.

Delicious, elusive scents fill the air, carried by the gentle puffs of breeze that rise now and then, most beguiling to the senses. And soporific too . . . I was sitting in one of those enchanted court-yards one drowsy midday, when I thought I heard monks chanting. I watched expectantly, to see them appear in solemn procession under the great portal . . . when I woke up: to find that though I had been dreaming, yet the song was not a dream; it came echoing eerily and not unmelodiously down the green tunnel of the forest track that I could glimpse through the gateway in the outer wall; louder and louder, until two native lads appeared, singing—as the peasants of the region often do when they are frightened of the haunting spirits likely to be encountered in such a place as this. They would have passed without noticing me; but they showed no sign of either surprise or alarm when I called to them, and came over at once and entered into conversation—largely conducted, owing to my linguistic limitations, by means of signs. Both boys carried bows and arrows, which they

showed me with pride: the bows beautifully finished and polished, and of exactly the same design as those carried by the warriors of the Angkor bas-reliefs. The arrows were made of the ribs of palm-fronds, with a piece of the leaf left to serve as the feather; and were carried in a neat quiver made of a bamboo section hung from a cord of jungle vine: the whole thing a good example of primitive, practical methods.

One of the boys demonstrated his skill by shooting at a slim sapling twenty yards or so away, scoring a hit every time; and the other carried a brown squirrel. The marksman showed me the wound plumb in the middle of its breast, explaining graphically, half in dumb show, that he was taking it home for dinner; adding, as he pointed to the monkeys, whose anxious little faces we could see peeping down through the branches far over our heads, that they too were very good to eat indeed.

Ta Prohm was discovered by Henri Mouhot, but it was Aymonier who learned from the natives the legend, firmly believed by them, of its origin. The hero of the story was a poor cripple, named Ta Prohm Kel, whose legs and arms were paralysed, and who just managed to crawl about the streets, begging a few coppers from the charitable. One day a horseman, who was really the god Indra in disguise, pulled up his horse in front of the cripple, where he sat in the dust, jumped off, and threw the horse's reins and a package to the poor wretch to hold. The god then disappeared; and the spirited horse, rearing up, pulled so violently on the reins that the cripple's limbs were straightened out. Struggling with the horse, Ta Prohm dropped the package on the ground, where it fell open, disclosing the insignia of royalty. These the miraculously cured cripple immediately donned, and sprang on the horse's back; whereupon it spread wings and soared with him into the air, and bore him away to the heavens. Ta Prohm became a great king, and built the huge stronghold called by his name . . . and after all, for anything we can prove to the contrary, the native story may be the true one!

When Mouhot arrived at Ta Prohm, he found two Siamese officials superintending the demolition of one of

its towers, by order of the King of Siam, for re-erection in his capital. Full particulars of this story, and a curious sequel to it, were learned later by Aymonier and quoted by him in his book *Cambodge*. The Siamese was a nobleman named Prah Sauphan, and was accompanied by his son; they had undertaken to dismantle piece by piece two of Ta Prohm's smaller towers, and set them up again in Bangkok. They had no sooner started on the work than a persistent rumour began to spread among the peasants of the region, that the Siamese king (then the overlord of Cambodia) had promised Prah Sauphan the governorship of Siem Réap as the reward of his labours. This story was the undoing of the enterprising gentleman from Siam. The peasants were already irritated by his demands for slaves to demolish a building which they regarded with superstitious awe; and, shrewdly egged on by the governor of Siem Réap then holding office (who, very naturally, saw no sense in contributing to his own displacement), they murdered the two luckless Siamese out of hand, before a single stone had been taken away. When the news reached Bangkok, a severe reprimand was sent to the governor, with orders to arrest the assassins and send them into Siam to receive their due punishment. A few scapegoats were duly sent off in charge of a strong guard—but they never arrived at Bangkok. The guards appeared there at last, after what they described as a most disastrous journey, to report that all the prisoners had died en route: the road being, as they explained, a dangerous and unhealthy one! The governor was next sent for, and closely questioned, but he, of course, knew nothing that could throw light on the affair! He was allowed to return after giving handsome 'presents' to all the authorities.

The sequel to the story occurred many years later, when a rumour was spread among the natives in the Siem Réap district that the murdered Siamese had come to life again in the person of a young man of twenty, the son of slave parents. M. Aymonier made inquiries; and the 'pretender' was formally interrogated by the governor—the son of the one who had connived at the murder. The claimant was able to give full details and descriptions of all 'his'—that

is, Prah Sauphan's — possessions, and to relate the exact circumstances of the murder; adding that he would have come back to life in his own body, but that it had been too shamefully mutilated (which was actually the case). The young man was tested over and over again by the bonzes in the monasteries, and the name he claimed, 'Prah Sauphan,' was drawn every time they put it with a number of blanks in an urn; thus convincing them that he spoke the truth. He claimed the return of the murdered man's possessions; but none of these were forthcoming after so long a lapse of time, except one of his wives, now an old woman, living at Battambang. Thither the reincarnated Prah Sauphan was taken to resume the long-interrupted connubial relations with the lady, who awaited her late husband with open arms. On meeting her, however, he declined the proffered bliss; and the only person who ever benefited by the strange tale was the claimant's mother, who was released from slavery in recognition of its possible truth!

The story seems to indicate that a passion for the acquisition of foreign architectural 'antiques' is not altogether confined to our friends the Americans; and further that the Cambodians are capable of a praiseworthy resentment at this removal of their historic landmarks, in which we British as a race are sadly lacking. I, for one, should be all in favour of dealing with any transatlantic Oil, Meat, or Hardware King who sought to tear down our mellow old half-timbered houses for re-erection on Long Island, precisely as the Cambodians dealt with the Siamese ravager of Ta Prohm. Though certainly the millionaire's reincarnation as a young British wage-slave would be a contingency most painful to contemplate.

For the most-part Angkor seems to have been the happy home of religious tolerance, to judge by the numbers of temples of different faiths that flourished side by side. But fanatics did play havoc now and then; and nowhere so ruthlessly as at Ta Prohm, where hundreds of carvings of Brahmanic figures have been deliberately smashed and disfigured with such cruel fury, that often they are only recognizable by comparison of their attributes and settings with those of identical figures undamaged elsewhere. The

local natives say that Ta Prohm was a temple of Brahma, and not of the royal cult of the Linga; and that the adjoining great group of buildings, Banteai Kdei—the 'citadel of cells'—was the monastery of its priests, with Sra Srang, the lake to the east of both, for the sacred ablutions of its religious community: a hypothesis as likely, and as hard to prove or disprove, as any other.

In the huge enclosure of Prah Kahn—the 'Sacred Sword'—though the giant trees have not attained to quite such nightmare size or numbers as at Ta Prohm, two miles or so away, there is much the same 'atmosphere': the same infinitely slow, unending struggle between the temples and the trees, so hopeless on the one side, so relentless on the other. The area enclosed by the great wall, with its moat, and giant-guarded causeways and entrances, of much the same design as those at Angkor Thom, is considerably larger than that at Ta Prohm; but the visitor who attempts to find a way among their tortuous passages is unlikely to notice it, for he will be just as completely lost in either. Prah Kahn, which is thought to be the older of the two (though it is mere supposition) is in an even more advanced state of ruin. But here, too, long and devoted study by skilled architects camped on the spot for long periods has enabled something approaching the amazing original plan to be reconstructed. It was built on the Khmer's favourite pattern of enormous concentric squares surrounded with galleries, and a central sanctuary crowned by a high tower. Here, as at the Bayon and at Ta Prohm, the exact number of towers has never yet been established; nor is it agreed (owing to their ruined state) whether or not they were originally in the form of four-faced human heads, like those of the Bayon. But the outer wall still retains the faces, as well as enough of its decoration, to show that Prah Kahn must have been the most superb of all the splendid strongholds in the Angkor group. At intervals all round the outer walls, with their backs to it, as though supporting it against their shoulders, stood magnificent 20-ft. Garudas—the fabulous human-bodied eagle on which the god Vishnu delighted to ride; each of these noble monsters was loaded with girdles,

necklaces, and bracelets of intricately carved ornamentation, and each grasped two Nagas, whose heads rose fanwise on either side, while their tails supported the tower that crowned the Garuda's head. What they can have looked like in their glory, seen from an angle of the wall, as their gigantic file stretched out of sight into the distance in either direction, baffles the imagination; for even to-day, towering proudly above you at their posts here and there—beside cruel breaches in the wall made by the fallen trees, whose white trunks, like the thigh-bones of some fantastically enormous giant, lie at a sickening angle across them—they remain among the most impressive of all the wealth of decorative motifs the Khmer artists left behind them.

The terrace of the principal entrance of Prah Kahn is more like one's forgotten childish dreams of the doorway to a Magician's palace than anything that the mature Western imagination could possibly conceive. It was only a race that had learned a superb architectural technique without forgetting how to believe in fairies, that could ever have achieved such a combination as this majestic portico, with its dark, imposing galleries, and the terrifying stone giants, so startlingly lifelike, that stand on guard at each side, looking as though they had marched straight out of a tale by Hans Andersen.

It was Aymonier's theory that this great group of buildings might have been 'Hariharalaya', the first of the three royal strongholds which were founded by King Jayavarman in the ninth century. This theory is negatived by the present generation of archæologists; but at all events the name 'Hariharalaya', which means 'abode of Harihara'—that is, of the gods Vishnu and Siva combined in one person—would be appropriate to a place which abounds with symbols of these two gods, which is rather unusual. Though it must be confessed that despite all their undoubted religious fervour, the cult to which the Khmer artists were most consistently faithful here as elsewhere, was that of the ever-smiling Apsaras, who were doubtless seductive enough to absolve their devotees from all blame. Possibly there are no more of them at Ta

Prohm and Prah Kahn than in many others of the temples; certainly there cannot be so many as at Angkor Wat. But nowhere else does the sprightly vivacity of these gay, frivolous, rather naughty ladies make quite so poignant an appeal as in its vivid contrast to the chaos of ruin and destruction all around them here. They are so alive; their smiles so entirely human, so full of feminine wiles; that not even the sublime tragedy of these lonely temples can quite efface their influence. Those alluring smiles follow you everywhere; and whether you will or no, you find yourself smiling back. . . . It was not for nothing that these houris learned their wiles all those many centuries ago. They knew how to deck their charms, too. The variety of their millinery is as infinite as that of their sisters of modern times, and each mode seems more attractive than the last. Some wear tiaras studded with gems (so detailed is the carving that you are left in no doubt about it); others have head-dresses crowned with one, two, or three delicately pointed pagodas; and yet others have braided their hair with garlands of flowers. The upper part of the graceful young bodies is adorned only with jewels; but so lavishly, with string upon string of necklaces, and bracelets by the score, as to compensate fully for the lack of other raiment. Heavily jewelled girdles and embroidered sashes encircle the slender waists; and below hangs the straight langouti, or skirt, just long enough to show the latest fashion in anklets. As to the feet . . . well . . . for the most part, perhaps the less said about them the better. For some inscrutable reason, the Khmer artists, past masters of carving as they were, were prone to break down when they came to these extremities; and as often as not, a lady whose other charms are all seen full-face, turns her none-too-small feet sideways, and shows them to you in profile! But it is only when she stands motionless that you notice it. When she is in action, dancing, singing, playing on one of a dozen different orchestral instruments, waving a fan, or peeping coyly round her mirror—but above all when she is dancing, for dancing is *par excellence* her proper métier—she is so distracting that you have no glances to waste on such trifles

as the sirens' feet. You can only smile encouragement, and leave them to it: all those poor, gallant little ladies, dancing and smiling, day in, day out, for perhaps a thousand years or more; and not one whit the less blithely since the last of their proper audience turned their backs upon them, and left them alone in the silence of the jungle six or seven centuries ago.

Loveliest, though far from being the largest, of all the tree-giants of Angkor, is one that has sprung from a seed dropped on the very centre of the crown of a tiny, exquisite temple called by the natives Neak Pean—'the encircling dragon.' It is the central point of a symmetrical system of square sunken basins, which in their turn were once the island centre of a vast sheet of water that seems to have been part of the plan of Prah Kahn: doubtless serving, as in the case of all these great reservoirs, to supply the enclosed stronghold with water. This elaborate little temple is encircled by two Nagas carved in sandstone; and in the rainy season, when the basin is full of water, it appears to be floating, supported upon their coils. The huge, smooth creamy roots of the great tree that grows on its summit descend on all sides of the temple to form natural arches over each of its doorways, and a cupola over the whole building that completely hides its roof. Then, burrowing under the shallow steps of its graded pedestal, they vanish —to emerge again in snaky coils beside the Nagas, and wind away out of sight along the low, curved margins of the basins and their lovely miniature attendant chapels. Above, the gleaming trunk rises erect and shapely, to branch out umbrella-wise and spread over the sanctuary a wide, symmetrical canopy of foliage probably unique in the world. Nature has dealt cruelly with man's handiwork elsewhere among the ruins; but here at least the forest has crowned it with a beauty that not even the greatest of the Khmer artists could have hoped to achieve.

They all have their own peculiar charm, these special playgrounds of the giant trees, and all of them are hard to leave. But it is to old Ta Prohm that you will find yourself drifting back again and again; back to that magical courtyard where the biggest of the big trees stand whispering

together—a place that might be the setting for all the fairy-tales ever written; and one that you can never leave without feeling that you are turning your back upon some lovely, elusive, enchanted palace, where for an hour or two you had recaptured all the lost romance of childhood..... Yet once outside it, and across the shadowy moat, the forest path seems so peaceful, so ordinary, so like one in an English woodland (save that the soft carpet into which your feet sink is patterned in pink and yellow and purple and crimson by the fallen blossoms of the flowering trees), that already you begin to wonder whether you have dreamt it all; until you see ahead of you above the outer gateway, the huge gentle smile of the guardian four-faced god, reassuring you that this private fairyland of yours is a reality, always ready and waiting to welcome you whenever you care to re-enter it.

It will still be there when the inevitable time has come to go back to the workaday world. For even in these matter-of-fact latter days, a journey to Angkor is no mere expedition to an ancient, abandoned kingdom, besprinkled with grey old ruins. It is an adventure into lost ages: a sort of uncharted voyage of the spirit.

Paradox though it may sound, these mighty masses of stone impress the mind with a curious illusion of intangibility; or rather with the conviction that their splendid material fabric is only a shell in which is pent up something infinitely greater still. They are charged and supercharged with the spiritual essence of their unrecorded past: a force invisible and elusive as electricity, and far more potent, for it needs no recharging: a radio-activity piercing through the huge blocks of stone as radium through its leaden bomb.

This strange compelling force that emanates from the Angkor temples is no chimera of a sentimental imagination. It is acknowledged by the men that it has drawn from the ends of the earth with the hope of reading its riddles: to prove so irresistible at close range that it has held them implacably captive till they died. It has turned solemn savants into poets; and wrested rhapsodies from eminent archæologists, who tried in vain to confine their descrip-

tions within scientific limits. And survey and measure as they might the huge material habitations of this strange spirit, the spirit itself that drove them to their quest, remained incalculable and aloof.

It may release you in the flesh; but as radium eats into corporeal tissue, so the Spirit of Angkor bites deep into the tissue of the soul. And though the day must come when the big trees hide the Angkor giants from you one by one; though you bid farewell on some cool sweet morning to the Great Wat, and see, perhaps for the last time with your mortal eyes, its magical lotus towers melting into the pale gold of the dawn: unreal, illusive, fairylike as a castle built of clouds, presently to vanish away; . . . the long, solemn façade, almost black; and the moat, faintly misty, with the sleeping trees reflected in its grey-green mirror; . . . though there is a lump in your throat, and in your heart a sense of irreparable loss; yet a part of its spirit goes with you, never to leave you while memory shall last.

Abandon yourself to it, and at any moment it will transport you back to its tabernacle among the ruins. Again you can feel the warmth of the sun-baked stone; smell the acrid odour of the bat-haunted galleries; hear the sharp crackle of dry teak-leaves under your feet; or watch again at your pleasure the wonders of dawn and sunset. Sadness of farewell there must always be; but mingled with it is an odd sense that even while you were living in the flesh under the very shadow of the temple towers, it was still rather the unseen than the seen that you were seeking: the secret of that immortal genius with which Angkor's builders—whether human or divine—created its beauty.

And so, in spirit, you need never say 'Good-bye' to Angkor. Its magic will go with you wherever Fate and the Gods may take you, to colour your thoughts and dreams until life's very end.

THE END

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